

ARIZONA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
fifty-fifth Legislature - Second Regular Session

HOUSE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND  
NONDISCRIMINATION

Report of Interim Meeting  
Thursday, March 17, 2022  
House Hearing Room 3 -- 1 P.M.

Convened 1:02PM

Recessed

Reconvened

Adjourned 5:25PM.

MINUTES RECEIVED  
CHIEF CLERK'S OFFICE

3-21-22

Members Present

Representative Bowers  
Representative Shah  
Representative Chávez  
Representative Cobb  
Representative Dunn  
Representative Jermaine  
Representative Nguyen  
Representative Pawlik

Members Absent

Agenda

Original Agenda -- Attachment 1

Request to Speak

Report -- Attachment 2

Committee Attendance

Report -- Attachment 3

Presentations

Name

Invited Guests

Organization

None

Attachments (Handouts)

4, 5 & 6



Jan Mullenau, Committee Secretary

March 21, 2022

(Original attachments on file in the Office of the Chief Clerk; video archives available at <http://www.azleg.gov>)

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## ARIZONA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### INTERIM MEETING NOTICE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

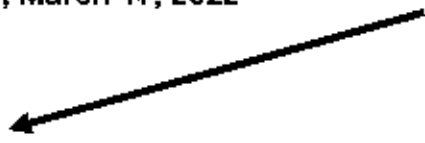
*Convened 1:02pm  
Adjourned 5:25pm*

#### HOUSE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND NONDISCRIMINATION

Date: Thursday, March 17, 2022

Time: 1 P.M.

Place: HHR 3



Members of the public may access a livestream of the meeting here:

<https://www.azleg.gov/videoplayer/?clientID=6361162879&eventID=2022031086>

#### AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Presentation: Corrected draft of H.B. 2802
3. Invited Guests
4. Public Testimony

#### Members:

Representative Russell Bowers, Co-Chair  
Representative Amish Shah, Co-Chair  
Representative César Chávez  
Representative Regina E. Cobb  
Representative Timothy Dunn  
Representative Jennifer Jermaine  
Representative Quang Nguyen  
Representative Jennifer Pawlik

03/14/2022  
03/16/2022  
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# ARIZONA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Fifty-fifth Legislature  
Second Regular Session

**HB 2802 (Corrected): housing; employment; public accommodations;  
antidiscrimination**

**Sponsor: Representative Bowers, LD 25**

**\*\*\*\*\*Corrected Version – Discussion Only\*\*\*\*\***

## Overview

Prohibits discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. Prohibits a health provider from providing *conversion therapy* to a patient who is a minor.

## Provisions

### ***Conversion Therapy and Unprofessional Conduct***

1. States it is unprofessional conduct for a health provider to provide *conversion therapy* to a patient or client who is a minor, and specifies the two below exceptions:
  - a) A clergy member or religious counselor who is acting substantially in a pastoral or religious capacity and not in a health provider capacity; and
  - b) A parent or grandparent acting substantially in a familial capacity and not in a health provider capacity. (Sec. 1)
2. Specifies the regulation of *conversion therapy* is of statewide concern and is not subject to additional regulation by a county, city, town or other political subdivision. (Sec. 1)

### ***Civil Rights Division Powers and Duties***

3. Directs the Civil Rights Division (Division) and the Civil Rights Advisory Board (Board) of the Attorney General's Office to do the following:
  - a) Add the categories of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* to the periodic surveys the Division and Board conduct to identify the existence and effect of discrimination;
  - b) Foster, through community effort, the elimination of discrimination based on *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*; and
  - c) Add the categories of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* to the publications of studies, investigations and research intended to promote goodwill and eliminate discrimination. (Sec. 2)

### ***Discrimination in Places of Public Accommodation***

4. Prohibits discrimination against any person because of *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* in places of public accommodation. (Sec. 4)
5. Prohibits a person, directly or indirectly, from refusing or withholding accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges to any person because of *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 4)

<input type="checkbox"/> Prop 105 (45 votes)	<input type="checkbox"/> Prop 108 (40 votes)	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency (40 votes)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fiscal Note
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6. States no distinction may be made with respect to any person based on *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* in connection with the price or quality of any item or service offered by the place of public accommodation. (Sec. 4)
7. Specifies discrimination or distinctions based on *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* do not apply to the following:
  - a) A building primarily used as a denominational headquarters, church administrative office or church conference center;
  - b) A place of worship;
  - c) A religious educational institution;
  - d) In connection with a religious celebration or exercise; and
  - e) Online operations or activities of an organization as outlined above. (Sec. 4)
8. Outlines exceptions for a place of public accommodation whose separation by sex is essential to the facility's operations. (Sec. 4)
9. Specifies the regulation of discrimination in places of public accommodation based on *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* is of statewide concern and regulation by the state supersedes any contrary ordinance, regulation, standard or other legal action by a county, city, town or other political subdivision. (Sec. 5)

#### ***Discrimination and Unlawful Practice***

10. Prohibits an employer from refusing to hire or discharging an employee because of the individual's *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
11. Prohibits an employer from limiting, classifying or adversely affecting an employee because of the individual's *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
12. States it is an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail to provide reasonable accommodation to an employee requesting greater privacy within a facility intended for the exclusive use of people of the same sex. (Sec. 7)
13. States it is an unlawful employment practice for an employment agency to fail or refuse to refer for employment any individual because of the individual's *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
14. States it is an unlawful employment practice for a labor organization to do the following against any individual because of *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*:
  - a) Exclude or expel the person from its membership;
  - b) Limit employment opportunities; or
  - c) Cause, or attempt to cause, an employer to discriminate against the individual. (Sec. 7)
15. Makes it an unlawful employment practice for an employer or labor organization to discriminate against any individual because of the individual's *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
16. Clarifies it is not an unlawful employment practice for an employer to hire a person or for a labor organization to classify its membership based on *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* provided that sex is a bona fide occupational qualification in which individuals are recognized as qualified based on their gender identity. (Sec. 7, 8)
17. Exempts a religious organization from the above employment and labor prohibitions relating to *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
18. Clarifies it is not an unlawful employment practice for an employer to apply different standards of compensation or opportunity to employees, or act on the results of any professionally

developed ability test, provided that the different standards and actions are not based on *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)

19. Specifies employers and labor organizations are not required by statute to grant preferential treatment because of *sexual orientation* or *gender identity*. (Sec. 7)
20. Specifies the regulation of unlawful employment practices based on *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* is of statewide concern and regulation by the state supersedes any contrary ordinance, regulation, standard or other legal action by a county, city, town or other political subdivision.
21. Outlines an exception to the above for instances in which an *employer* includes a person who has fewer than 15 employees. (Sec. 9)

#### ***Filing Charges, Investigations and Findings***

22. Outlines affirmative actions that may be ordered if the court finds a person engaged in unlawful employment practice relating to *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 10)

#### ***Religious Organization and Private Club Exemption***

23. States a religious organization or *religious educational institution* is not prohibited from the following:
  - a) Limiting the sale, rental or occupancy of its dwellings owned or operated for non-commercial purposes to people of the same religion; or
  - b) Giving preference to people of the same religion or to *people adhering to its religion*. (Sec. 12)

#### ***Appraisal Exemption***

24. Specifies a person engaged in the business of furnishing appraisals of real property is not prohibited from taking into consideration factors other than *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 13)

#### ***Sales, Rentals, Advertisements and Inspections of Dwellings***

25. Prohibits a person from discriminating against any person because of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* in the following instances:
  - a) Refusing to sell or rent to any person; (Sec. 14)
  - b) In the terms, conditions or privileges of sale or rental of a dwelling; (Sec. 14)
  - c) Publishing any notice or advertisement with respect to the sale or rental of a dwelling indicating a preference, limitation or discrimination; (Sec. 15) and
  - d) Indicating to any person because of *sexual orientation* or *gender identity* that a dwelling is not available for sale or rental inspection if, in fact, the dwelling is available for inspection. (Sec. 16)

#### ***Entry Into Neighborhood***

26. Restricts a person, for profit, from inducing or attempting to induce a person to sell or rent a dwelling by representations regarding the entry into a neighborhood of a person because of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 17)

#### ***Residential Real Estate Related Transaction***

27. States a person whose business includes engaging in residential real estate transactions may not discriminate against a person in making a real estate related transaction available or in the terms or conditions of the transaction because of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. (Sec. 18)

### **Brokerage Services**

28. Prohibits a person from denying any person access to, or participation in, a multiple listing service, real estate brokers' organization or other service relating to the business of renting or selling dwellings because of *sexual orientation or gender identity*. (Sec. 19)

### **Discrimination and the Sale or Rental of a Dwelling**

29. Specifies the regulation of discrimination based on *sexual orientation or gender identity* is of statewide concern and regulation by the state supersedes any contrary ordinance, regulation, standard or other legal action by a county, city, town or other political subdivision. (Sec. 20)

### **Miscellaneous**

30. Modifies the definition of *employee, reasonable accommodation, religion and undue hardship*. (Sec. 5, 6)
31. Defines *conversion therapy, exempt religious organization, gender identity, government, health provider, leave of general usage, perform the essential functions and sexual orientation*. (Sec. 1, 3, 6, 11, 21)
32. Entitles this act as the "Equality and Fairness for All Arizonans Act." (Sec. 22)
33. Makes technical and conforming changes. (Sec. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 21)

# Information Registered on the Request to Speak System

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## *House Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty and Nondiscrimination (3/17/2022)*

### **4. Public Testimony**

#### **Support:**

Eric Miller, representing self; Glenn Kasprzyk, representing self; Lynette Braddock, representing self; Mayor Ginny Dickey, representing self; Mike Huckins, GREATER PHOENIX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE; Michelle Steinberg, representing self; Michiko Price, representing self; Blair Moses, representing self; Lisa Malachowsky, representing self; Shauna Crusa, representing self; Amber Wutich, representing self; Margaret Gibson, representing self; Susan Cannata, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS - AZ CHAPTER; Nichole Cassidy, representing self

#### **Oppose:**

Abigail Jensen, representing self; Lisa Fink, representing self; Michelle Dillard, representing self; Stephanie Seigla, representing self; ALICE J Wells, representing self; elizabeth Michele Edson, representing self; Kathleen Pettycrew, representing self; Karen Cusano, representing self; Peggy Yeargain-Williams, representing self; Eric Zaklukiewicz, representing self; Jay Arnold Allen, representing self; Cynthia Soffrin, representing self; Martha O'Connor, representing self; Mary Ganapol, representing self; Joan Thomas, representing self; Tom Hermann, representing self; Barbara Parker, representing self; Cindy Dahlgren, representing self; Linda Julson, representing self; Frederick James, representing self; Jeannine Reno, representing self; Kristin Downing, representing self; Greg Parsons, representing self; Steve Singkofer, representing self; JP Martin, representing self

#### **All Comments:**

Mayor Ginny Dickey, Self: I support HB2802, Equality and Fairness for ALL Arizonans. Thank you, Mayor Ginny Dickey; Mike Huckins, GREATER PHOENIX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: Support HB 2802; Michelle Steinberg, Self: What a wonderful opportunity you have today to extend Arizona's current non-discrimination protections to gay and transgender Arizonans in employment, housing and public accommodations and to ban the harmful practice of conversion therapy; Blair Moses, Self: That friends at work can be fired, and friends can be evicted from housing, for being part of the LGBTQ community is abhorrent. Passing this bill is vital to ensuring equality and fairness to all Arizonans and vital for Arizona's economic growth.; Shauna Crusa, Self: Please pass 2802 it is good for AZ; Margaret Gibson, Self: Please pass 2802; Susan Cannata, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS - AZ CHAPTER: We support a ban on conversion therapy for minors and appreciate the sponsors' intent; we believe the bill can be strengthened and we support allowing local communities to pass more rigorous protections; Nichole Cassidy, Self: It's time to protect all Arizonans.; Lisa Fink, Self: This bill does not protect women's privacy.; Stephanie Seigla, Self: NO on HB2802 until you remove local bans and ANY exemption. Religious "liberty" should not be an excuse to inflict abuse and cause harm.; Kathleen Pettycrew, Self: NO conversion therapy at all, for anyone, by anyone; Peggy Yeargain-Williams, Self: please do not create any exemptions that allow conversion therapy and anti LGBTQ discrimination to continue.; Eric Zaklukiewicz, Self: Bill is overly rife with unconstitutional religious privileges, and local governments should not be banned from banning conversion therapy.; Cynthia Soffrin, Self: Conversion therapy of LGBTQ+ citizens is WRONG whether it is done by a doctor, a religious organization or a paid mercenary. This bill needs a lot of work.; Mary Ganapol, Self: Pls don't ban local gov'ts from banning conversion therapy AND

there should be NO exceptions for religious orgs/faith leaders!; Barbara Parker, Self: Polling has shown that the Citizens of Arizona do NOT feel this is needed or necessary & will create problems. IT will undermine rights. It is unconstitutional in that it will censor rights & free speech and violates several ARS statutes. BAD BILL!; Jeannine Reno, Self: Banning local governments from outlawing conversion therapy is vacuuming total control for the AZLeg. Religious organizations and faith leaders should not be exempt from this bill.; Greg Parsons, Self: I feel that HB2802 is a step in the right direction, but as written the concessions made to the religious right largely undermine the good the bill is attempting to achieve.; Steve Singkofer, Self: Religious exemptions should never be allowed for any law. Especially when the exemption would allow psychologically and physically damaging conversion therapy to be conducted on innocent children. Follow the science, not a 2000-year-old "holy" book.; JP Martin, Self: This bill creates preemptions, overriding Tucson and Pima County's strong conversion therapy bans. Allows grandparents to perform conversion therapy. Allows providers to give conversion therapy online. Do y'all think queer people don't read?!



PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Please PRINT Clearly

Committee on HB 2802 Bill Number 2802  
Date 3/17/22 ☐ Support ☒ Oppose ☐ Neutral  
Name Rustin Pearce Need to Speak? ☒ Yes ☐ No  
Representing Self Are you a registered lobbyist? NO  
Complete Address rustin.pearce@betanail.com  
E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number 801-360-1753  
Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*FIVE-MINUTE SPEAKING LIMIT\*\*\*

**ARIZONA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
Fifty-fifth Legislature – Second Regular Session

**INTERIM COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE RECORD**

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND NONDISCRIMINATION

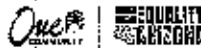
Co- Chair Mr. Bowers Co- Chair Mr. Shah

DATE	<u>3-17-22</u>	
CONVENED	<u>1:02pm</u>	
RECESSED		
RECONVENED		
ADJOURNED	<u>5:24pm</u>	
MEMBERS		
Mr. Chavez	✓	
Ms. Cobb	✓	
Mr. Dunn	✓	
Mrs. Jermaine	✓	
Mr. Nguyen	✓	
Mrs. Pawlik	✓	
Mr. Bowers Co- Chair	✓	
Mr. Shah Co- Chair	✓	

✓ Present      --- Absent      exc Excused



# EQUALITY & FAIRNESS FOR ALL ARIZONANS



March 17th, 2022

Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty and Non-discrimination  
Arizona House of Representatives  
1700 West Washington Street  
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Honorable Members of the Committee,

As business leaders, elected officials, faith leaders, community leaders and every day Arizonans, we write in support of HB2802, the Equality and Fairness for all Arizonans Act. This bill will update Arizona's current non-discrimination law to include sexual orientation and gender identity while also preserving religious rights for people and institutions of faith. Additionally, HB2802 will ban conversion therapy for minors among licensed medical professionals, and provide workplace protections for religious minorities. This bill reflects the best of policy making - Arizonans coming together not in partisanship or division, but to unify and create a more just and fair Arizona for all people.

HB2802 brings the LGBTQ community and communities of faith together in celebration of the great American tenets of religious freedom, equal treatment, and fairness. This bill will not force houses of worship or religious schools to do anything against their religious beliefs. It would simply require that non-religious businesses that provide goods and services to the public provide those goods and services to everyone under the same terms.

HB2802 is also good for the business of Arizona. Today, 94% of Fortune 500 companies have non-discrimination policies that include gender identity and/or sexual orientation. But it's not enough for businesses to be inclusive - They want to know their employees have equal protections when they are walking down the street, at their doctor's offices, at restaurants and at home. It will also help our state attract the large conventions and national events that generate hundreds of millions of dollars for our economy. Currently, Arizona is at a competitive disadvantage to attracting these marque events because we are not inclusive of LGBTQ people

while our neighbors are. And increasingly, these large events ask about equal protections in their application procedures. This measure would allow us to compete on an even playing field with our competition.

This measure isn't about special treatment, it's about equal treatment. HB2802 simply ensures that all Arizonans have the same opportunity to live, work, and contribute. The principles of non-discrimination are rooted in core American values of fairness and equality. Nobody should have to live in fear of being fired, denied housing, or denied services. We respectfully urge you to vote yes on HB2802 to create a stronger, fairer Arizona for all.

Sincerely,

ONE Community, Angela Hughey, President  
Equality Arizona, Michael Soto, CEO  
Sunbelt Holdings, John Graham, Chairman & CEO  
Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Chris Camacho, CEO  
Plaza Companies, Sharon Harper, CEO  
Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, Todd Sanders, President & CEO  
Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association, Kim Grace Sabow, President & CEO,  
Arizona Technology Council, Steven Zylstra, President & CEO  
Arizona Technology Council, Eric Miller, Board Chairman  
Visit Phoenix, Ron Price, President & CEO  
Visit Mesa, Marc Garcia, President and CEO  
Tempe Convention and Visitors Bureau, Michael Martin, Interim President & CEO  
Experience Scottsdale, Rachel Sacco, President & CEO  
Glendale Chamber of Commerce (AZ), Robert Heidt, President & CEO  
City of Glendale, Jamie Aldama, Vice Mayor  
City of Scottsdale, David Ortega, Mayor  
City of Mesa, Jenn Duff, Vice Mayor  
Town of Fountain Hills, Ginny Dickey, Mayor  
City of Phoenix, Karen Peters, Deputy City Manager  
Chandler Chamber of Commerce, Terri Kimble, President & CEO  
Phoenix Mercury, Vincent Kozar, President  
Arizona Coyotes, Marina Carpenter, EVP Public Affairs  
Arizona Coyotes, Christina Kehoe, Marketing Manager  
Phoenix Rising FC, Jason Minnick, Director of Communications  
United Methodist Church, Grant Hagiya, Bishop  
Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, Jennifer Reddall, Bishop/The Right Reverend  
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Phoenix, Paul Rockower, Executive Director  
Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern Arizona, Maurice Goldman, Chair  
Local First Arizona, Kimber Lanning, CEO  
Local First Arizona, Thomas Barr, Vice President  
Arizona Small Business Association, Rick Murray, Public Policy Chair-Board Member  
PetSmart, LLC, J.K. Symancyk, President & CEO

American Medical Response, Glenn Kasprzyk, President - Southwest Region  
Upward Projects, Samuel Foos, Vice President of People & Culture  
Arizona Bank & Trust, William Callahan, President & CEO  
Goodmans Interior Structures, Adam Goodman, CEO  
A&P Global Goods, Athena Gibbons, COO  
Korte Group LLC, Virginia Korte, Owner  
InMedia Company, Rick McCartney, President & CEO  
The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation, Laura Mitchell, Executive Director  
Arizona Community Foundation, Steven G Seleznow, President and Chief Executive Officer  
Valley of the Sun United Way, Rob Podlogar, Chief Community Development & Engagement Officer  
Mountain Park Health Center, John Swagert, MD, CEO  
Arizona Coyotes, Senior Director, Lyndsey Fry, Amateur Hockey Development  
Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Stuart Graff, President and CEO  
Greater Phoenix Equality Chamber of Commerce, Michael Mazzocco, Board Chairperson  
National Council of Jewish Women Arizona, Civia Tamarkin, President  
Arizona's Children Association, Jacob Schmitt, President & CEO  
Arizona Chapter National Safety Council, Rick Murray, CEO  
Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Greg Peterson, President  
Four Peaks Brewing Co, Christopher Meyer, General Manager  
Four Peaks Brewing Co, Cristina Polli, Sr. Brand Manager  
Chicanos Por La Causa, David Adame, President & CEO  
City of Scottsdale, David Ortega, Mayor of Scottsdale  
City of Mesa, Julie Spilsbury, Councilmember  
City of Mesa, David Luna, Councilmember  
East Valley Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Frankie Jo Rios, President & CEO  
Asian Corporate & Entrepreneur Leaders, Jason Wong, Founder and Board Chairman  
Arizona Jews for Justice, Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, Founder  
Design Pickle, Russ Perry, CEO  
KEO Marketing Inc, Sheila Kloeckorn, CEO  
Equality Health Foundation, Tomas Leon, President  
Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, Jenna Panas, CEO  
VH Included Consulting, Katee Van Horn, CEO  
Experience Scottsdale, Rachel Pearson, Vice President of Community & Government Affairs  
BestCompaniesAZ, Denise Gredler, Founder & CEO  
OH Strategic, Bettina Nava, President  
OH Strategic Communications, Sophie O'Keefe-Zelman, Vice President  
Teamworks Communication, Barb Harris, Partner  
TEGNA, Michael Ogaz, Digital Sales Manager  
Guidesac, Erin Boyd, Government & External Affairs Lead  
OutIsTheNewIn, Johnnie Ghiglia, Executive Director  
ONE Community, Sheri Owens, Vice President  
ONE Community, Janine Skinner, Community Engagement Director  
Brick Road Coffee, Gabe Hagen, Co-Founder

Episcopal Church of St. Matthew, Rev. Richard Wilson, Rector  
Dayspring UMC, Jeff Procter-Murphy, Lead Pastor  
Desert Heritage Church UCC/DOC, Derrick Elliott, Pastor  
Desert Messenger News, Shanana Rain Golden-Bear, Publisher/Editor  
Southwest Center for HIV/AIDS, Jessyca Leach, Executive Director  
Cross Roads United Methodist Church, Mary Bullis, Reverend  
All Saints of the Desert Episcopal Church, Julie O'Brien, Rector  
Gelfert Health, Chuck Warshaver, President  
Carter Law Firm, Ruth Carter, Evil Genius  
BLOOM365, Donna Bartos, Founder & CEO  
Habitat Metro, LLC, Tim Sprague, Managing Member  
ADE, Patricia Rethore Larson, Early Childhood Education Program Specialist  
FrontoTemporal Dementia Advocacy Resource Network, Teresa Webb, Chair  
Casa de Cristo Church and Apostolic Center, James Simpson, Co-Pastor  
Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Arizona Properties, Monika Kraml, Realtor  
Queer Center, Jesus Baltazar, President  
Adams, Habern, & Gray, CPAs, PLLC, Rondi Habern, CPA  
LD13 Democrats, Carol Maas, 1st Vice Chair  
Southwest Solutions, Vera Minot, Creative Director/Owner  
Tucson LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Vera Minot, President  
LGBTQ Health Caucus, Aaron, Guest Chair  
Design One, Donald Nottingham, Owner  
Goodman Consulting, LLC, Louis Goodman, CEO  
Beatitudes Campus, Michelle Just, President and CEO  
NeverNot Social, Christian Weninger, Owner  
Arizona Justice for Our Neighbors, Scott Morris, Board Member and Treasurer  
Key Innovative Business Solutions, Lynn Murphy, President  
K-Vaughn Consulting, Kerwin Brown, Managing Principal  
Chalice Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Vernon Meyer, Pastor  
Common Sense-Arizona, Ilana Lowery, Director  
Granada Urban Development, DEANNA JORDAN, Principal  
Contract Worker, Elizabeth Pagel, Associate Publisher  
Where Gays Retire LLC, Mark Goldstein, Owner  
One-n-ten, Nate Rhoton, CEO  
Timothy Weymann, L.C.S.W., Timothy Weymann  
Coupa Software, Ilana Myerson, Sr Manager  
Plaza Healthcare, Robynn McDonald, LPN  
Temple Emanuel of Tempe, Patricia Glascom, Sisterhood Board Member  
Mark's Bookmark Bookseller, Mark Hayduke Grenard, CEO/Owner  
Stevens Design, Christine Stevens, Creative Director / Owner  
Arizona Human Rights Fund (now Equality Az), Bill MacDonald, Retired/Founder  
Prism Network, James Helbling  
NMAAB, Chris Waychoff, Numbers Guru  
Retired Attorney, Dennis Kavanaugh, Former Vice Mayor, City of Mesa

Child and Family Resources, Inc, Eric Schindler, President/CEO  
 Temple Emanuel of Tempe, Dina Bedak, Board member  
 Spear Education, Justin DeRo, Technical Delivery Specialist  
 ALL Arizona, Bryce Cook, Co-founder  
 City Square Church, Gina Pollard, Pastor  
 United Church of Christ clergy, Mitzi Ellits, Rev.  
 Carsultants, Brian Sinuk, Owner  
 Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, Michelle Blumenberg, Interim Executive Director  
 Arizona Human Rights Fund, Richard Underwood  
 EMERGING DOMESTIC MARKET VENTURES, LLC, Gonzalo de la Melena, CEO  
 SheDoc Family Practice, Patricia Clarke, Dr  
 LJM, LLC, Layne Mortensen, Managing Director  
 Shepherd of the Hills UCC, Rock Fremont Jr., Rev.  
 Bank of America, Corri Rankins, VP Operations project consultant  
 Episcopal Diocese of Arizona, Gil Stafford, The Rev Dr  
 Desert Southwest Conference of The United Methodist Church, Sarai Case, Rev.  
 Visit Phoenix, Sarai Case, Visitor Experience Manager  
 TPI Composites, Jenny Holsman Tetreault, Vice President and Associate General Counsel  
 Trinity Cathedral, Troy Mendez, The Very Rev.  
 Beatitudes Campus, Rev. David Ragan, VP Resident Services  
 Phoenix Pride, Mike Fornelli, Executive Director  
 LGBTQ Awareness Group of Arizona Inc, Den'na Davenport, President Founder Bullhead City  
 LGBTQ+ Awareness Pride Center  
 Michael Mazzocco Events, Michael Mazzocco, Owner  
 The Nine Design Group, Brett Markusen, Owner  
 Northwest Tucson Jewish Community, Randolph Myerson  
 JWI, Julie Ivanhoe  
 Groff-Swint Media LLC™, Benjamin Groff, Vice President Operations  
 Groff's Home Out West, Benjamin Groff, Reverend  
 BBK Tobacco & Foods, LLP, Brendan Mahoney, General Counsel  
 Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, Heidi Gerrish, Communications Coordinator  
 Aligned at Work, Laurie Battaglia, CEO  
 United Methodist Church, Kimberly Scott, Rev.  
 Catalina UMC, Melissa Rynders, Senior Pastor  
 United Methodist Church, Charles Ryth, Chaplain  
 Guardian Angels Catholic Community, ECC, Elaine Groppenbacher, LCSW MDiv. Rev  
 Lutheran Social Services, Jessica O'Donnell, Volunteer Coordinator  
 GiftKraken, Lauren Witte, Senior Marketing Manager  
 West Valley Women Networking Association, Lisa Platt, Chief Connections Officer  
 McKesson, Jonathan Ivanhoe, Sr Director Workforce Planning and Analytics  
 Splash Printing and Marketing, Jackie Wszalek, Owner  
 Presbyterian Church, Al Gephart, Rev  
 Intel, Kalp Parikh, Engineer

Amistad Clinic, Shaun McFarland, Clinic Manager/Owner  
New Image Orthodontics, Aaron Ivanhoe, Orthodontist  
Healthy Synergy, LLC, Sophia Murphy, Owner  
Speas Law, PLLC, Adrienne Speas, Owner  
Blessed Dragon Productions LLC, Hayami Dewberry, Owner  
Shadow Rock Church, Liz Curry, Member  
St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Cliff Blinman, The Rev./Affiliated Clergy  
Episcopal Campus Ministry at the University of Arizona, Benji Garren, Chaplain  
Thrive Wellness, Carrie Smith-Hardee, Owner  
Arizona Interfaith Power & Light, Rev. Doug Bland, Executive Director  
Compass CBS Foundation, Edgar Olivo, Executive Director  
The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Alison Lee, Interim Rector  
Episcopal Church of St. Matthew, Frank Bergen, Priest Associate  
Dayspring United Methodist Church, Joel Bullock, Pastor of Congregational Care  
Vermillion Events and Design LLC, David Twigger, CEO  
First Eval, Melissa Kovacs, Statistician and Founder  
Animals and Humans in Disaster, Cynthia Anderson, CEO  
CASCO Financial Group, Catherine Scrivano, President  
Heartful Editor, Sara Henry, Founder and Editor-in-Chief  
Many-to-One Facilitators, Dennis Skinner, Owner and President  
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Equality Arizona, Jeanne Woodbury, Policy & Communications Director  
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 Desert Heritage Church UCC/DOC, Gail Bird  
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 Equality Arizona, Nichole Cassidy, Deputy Director  
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Kristine Stephens  
Nick Jensen, Development Manager  
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Jason Bench, Tattoo Artist  
Carlos Contreras  
Joseph Shank

THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

NORTH AMERICA SOUTHWEST AREA

March 16, 2022

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS FOR ALL ARIZONANS ACT

Dear Speaker Bowers & Members of the Ad Hoc Committee,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is pleased to be part of a coalition of faith, business, LGBTQ, and community groups supporting the *Equality and Fairness for All Arizonans Act*. This bill is the result of good-faith efforts to work together in a spirit of mutual respect and accommodation to address issues that matter to every citizen in Arizona.

Everyone should have a fair opportunity to obtain a job, a place to live, and public services. This bipartisan bill protects those rights for LGBTQ persons while also protecting the religious rights of individuals and faith communities. While no bill is perfect, this bill strikes a balance that encourages respect and fairness for all people.

The Church has joined similar coalitions to support religious freedom and non-discrimination bills in the past, including one in Utah in 2015 and another at the federal level in 2019. In supporting the federal bill, the Church stated that "the nation is more united when diverse individuals and groups can work cooperatively to advance sound policy."

We invite everyone to carefully read and consider an address delivered in November 2021 at the University of Virginia by President Dallin H. Oaks of the Church's First Presidency entitled "Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination," available at <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-dallin-h-oaks-speech-university-of-virginia>

In this landmark address, President Oaks calls for "a new, workable balance between religious freedom and non-discrimination." In order to achieve this balance, he reminded us that

*Good faith negotiation invites that seldom-appreciated virtue so necessary to democracy: tolerance, free of bigotry toward those whose opinions or practices differ from our own. .... Far from being a weakness, reconciling adverse positions through respectful negotiation is a virtue. As Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."*

President Oaks pointed people to a "better way" that focuses on "seeking harmony by finding practical solutions to our differences, with love and respect for all people" which "does not require any compromise of core principles."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints supports bills like the *Equality and Fairness for All Arizonans Act* that seek to resolve conflicts between LGBTQ and religious rights in a balanced and respectful way.

Sincerely,



Elder Jonathan S. Schmitt  
Area Seventy

## Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination

By President Dallin H. Oaks of the First Presidency of

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 2021 Joseph Smith Lecture, The University of Virginia, November 12, 2021

Friends:

I feel privileged to be in this honored place. I love this country, which I believe was established with the blessings of God. I love its Constitution, whose *principles* I believe were divinely inspired.<sup>[1]</sup> I am, therefore, distressed at the way we are handling the national issues that divide us. We have always had to work through serious political conflicts, but today too many approach that task as if their preferred outcome must entirely prevail over all others, even in our pluralistic society. We need to work for a better way — a way to resolve differences without compromising core values. We need to live together in peace and mutual respect, within our defined constitutional rights.

As a religious person who has served in government at both federal and state levels and now as a leader in the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have always known of the tensions experienced when persons who rely on the free exercise of religion are conflicted between duties to God and duties to country. More recently, I have come to understand better the distress of persons who feel that others are invoking constitutional rights like free exercise of religion and freedom of speech to deny or challenge their own core beliefs and their access to basic constitutional rights. I deeply regret that these two groups have been drawn into conflict with one another.

I.

As you have seen, I have titled my remarks “Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination.” This title acknowledges that our society is still painfully unsettled in managing the relationship between religious freedom and nondiscrimination, but also expresses my belief that it need not remain so. My goal is to suggest a helpful and feasible path forward without excessively accommodating either the Left or the Right or the Religious or the Non-Religious. I hope what I say will be helpful to those who seek a better way for the advocates of religious freedom and nondiscrimination to relate to one another as fellow citizens dedicated to maintaining a civil society.

I begin with a proposition I hope all will share. As a practical basis for co-existence, we should accept the reality that we are fellow citizens who need each other. This requires us to accept some laws we dislike, and to live peacefully with some persons whose values differ from our own. Amid such inevitable differences, we should make every effort to understand the experiences and concerns of others, especially when they differ from our own.

We can only succeed in this effort to the extent that we acknowledge and respect each other’s highest ideals and human experiences. We must not be part of what Professor Arthur C. Brooks of Harvard’s Kennedy School describes as “a culture of contempt — a habit of seeing people who disagree with us not as merely incorrect or misguided but as worthless.”<sup>[2]</sup> A basic step is to avoid labeling our adversaries with epithets such as “godless” or “bigots.” As the *Deseret News*, a paper published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, editorialized:

*Conflicts between religious liberty and nondiscrimination principles are exacerbated when advocates for nondiscrimination paint people of faith as bigots, and when people of faith fail to appreciate the brutal history of the basic human rights of marginalized groups, such as gays and lesbians.[3]*

When some advocates voice insults or practice other minor provocations, both sides should ignore them. Our society already has too many ugly confrontations. If we answer back, we tend to mirror the insult. A better response is that of the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. When he agreed to meet with a staunch atheist who detested everything he held sacred, the Rabbi was asked whether he would try to convert him. "No," he answered, "I'm going to do something much better than that. I'm going to listen to him." [4]

Another basic imperative is that we should not seek total dominance for our own position; we should seek fairness for all. Specifically, people of faith should not contest every nondiscrimination law or policy that could possibly impinge, however insignificantly, on institutional or individual religious freedom. Likewise, proponents of nondiscrimination need not contest every religious freedom exemption from nondiscrimination laws. The goals of both sides are best served by resolving differences through mutual respect, shared understanding, and good faith negotiations. And both must accept and respect the rule of law.

Without acceptance of such ethical and political fundamentals on all sides, we are unlikely to move forward with this vital task.

I don't mean to minimize the difficulty of what I am advocating. I simply invite my audience, who already understand the complexity of current divisions, to consider the possibility of reconciliation as I proceed with the most difficult address I have ever undertaken.

II.

I will now suggest some important principles that will help avoid potential pitfalls as we attempt to go forward.

Where there is genuine conflict, one constitutional right should not be invoked to try to cancel another constitutional right. Both must be balanced legally and negotiated politically in a way that upholds essential rights to the greatest extent possible. In doing so, people of faith should not assume that those who advocate nondiscrimination have no regard for religious freedom or that nondiscrimination lacks any constitutional basis. Similarly, those who advocate nondiscrimination should not assume that those asserting claims of religious freedom are seeking a "license to discriminate." There are worthy constitutional and ethical arguments on both sides of such disputes, and, so far as possible, we should seek to accommodate them consistent with the most important interests of all sides. This is not easy when we differ so fundamentally on matters of such immense importance. But the effort is essential if we are to live together in peace in a pluralistic society.

We should also be wary of the idea that one set of rights automatically trumps another in all circumstances. Both religious freedom and nondiscrimination are important values that are powerfully protected by law. Nondiscrimination principles have been given increasing social recognition in the last century and are now rooted in the constitutional guarantee of equal

protection of the law. Yet, they still cannot be said to obviate the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom.

The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights singles out the "free exercise" of religion for specific protection, along with the related freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. These rights enjoy singular status because of their paramount significance to the foundations of our constitutional republic. They are rights on which all other rights depend. Protecting them is essential to safeguarding and perpetuating all constitutional freedoms. That is why religious exercise and religious expression enjoy special constitutional protection.

But even though the First Amendment obviously guarantees the right to *exercise* or practice religious beliefs and affiliations, that right is not absolute. As advocates for religious freedom, we must yield to the fact that in a nation with citizens of many different religious beliefs or disbeliefs, the government must sometimes limit the right of some to *act* upon their beliefs when it is necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of all.

With equal sincerity, I invite nondiscrimination advocates to recognize the reality of the threat to religious freedom that is currently associated with expanding nondiscrimination laws. Those who demand that faith communities change their practices should not seek to force overall changes by legal fiat but rather encourage selective accommodations through persuasion, good faith negotiation and legislative reform. In this way we can all unite in support of nondiscrimination in many areas of social life.

While we peacefully await resolution of conflicts, I strongly urge all participants in these controversies to acknowledge the validity of and to obey existing laws sustained by the highest available judicial authority in the Constitution. Executive officers responsible for executing and enforcing such laws must not assume authority they do not possess; they too are subject to the law. All such officials take an oath to support the constitution and laws of their jurisdiction. That oath does not permit them to use their official position to override the law to further their personal beliefs — religious or otherwise.

This principle was violated following the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision by a county clerk who invoked religious reasons to justify her office's refusal to issue marriage licenses to same-gender couples. More far-reaching violations of the rule of law occurred earlier when a state attorney general and governor refused to enforce or defend a state law limiting marriages to those between a man and a woman because they personally opposed that law on secular grounds. Constitutional duties, including respect for the vital principle of separation of powers, are fundamental to the rule of law. Neither governments nor their citizens can afford to tolerate the revocation of a law (either its text or its operation) by officials not constitutionally authorized to revoke it.

III.

This is not the setting, and I am not the authority to suggest how the separate guarantees of religious freedom and nondiscrimination should be adjudicated in specific head-to-head conflicts. My purpose is more modest. I advocate the moral and political imperative of reconciling existing conflicts and avoiding new ones, not to promote my favored outcome in any particular controversy. I come to you not as a lawyer with the experiences already mentioned, but as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom many of us worship.

Still, religious Freedom has been a dominant interest of mine for many years. Seventy-three years ago, when I was only 16, the Supreme Court endorsed with particular force the metaphor of "a wall between Church and State, which must be kept high and impregnable." [5] The legal relationship implied by this metaphor has been confusing and much criticized and is being selectively displaced. Over time, I have come to wish for a better metaphor, one sufficient to define the limits but also allow accommodation of the mutual interests of religion and government. Less rigid than a "wall," the boundary should be permeable enough to admit light and flexible enough to allow mutual support. That change has not happened.

We are currently governed by the tests established in the 1990 case of *Employment Division v. State*, [6] but its influence is clearly waning. Subsequent cases have exposed its failure as a broadly applicable and publicly understandable standard to help reconcile opposing parties. [7] Rather, it appears to have perpetuated, if not exacerbated, the divisiveness in our relationships. It has become increasingly clear that we now need a new, workable balance between religious freedom and nondiscrimination.

In these circumstances it is timely to ask how we should go forward to resolve urgent conflicts between the wide-spread support for nondiscrimination and the constitutional guarantee of free exercise of religion. Most media coverage and public perception of these conflicts understandably focus on court rulings, especially those of the United States Supreme Court. We all know that the courts are intended to have the final word on constitutional issues. We also know that court opinions in this area are rigorously policed by litigation organizations on both sides who solicit and groom additional cases to advance their causes through favorable court rulings. Though such rulings are immensely important, I caution against primary reliance on judicial rulings to ultimately resolve these conflicts. What is needed is wise public policy, not a declaration of the winner in a legal contest.

Litigation should not be the first recourse in resolving our differences. Courts are constitutionally limited to resolving the specific cases before them. They are ill-suited to the overarching, complex, and comprehensive policy-making that is required in a circumstance like the current conflict between two great values. Notwithstanding my years of working with judicial opinions, I prefer the initial route of legislative law-making on big questions like the ones now before us. I find wisdom in the observation of Professor (later Dean) Martha Minow of the Harvard Law School. In her influential article on this subject, she concluded that "[a]ccommodation and negotiation can identify practical solutions where abstract principles sometimes cannot." [8] Professor Minow further observed that problem-solving by negotiation "is highly relevant to sustaining and replenishing both American pluralism and constitutional protections for minority groups." [9]

Successful negotiation requires that neither side be unduly influenced by the extreme voices that often drive litigation, especially litigation sponsored by ideological groups. Extreme voices influence popular opinion, but they polarize and sow resentment as they seek to dominate their opponents and achieve absolute victory. Such outcomes are rarely sustainable or even attainable, and they are never preferable to living together in mutual understanding and peace.

Good faith negotiation invites that seldom-appreciated virtue so necessary to democracy: tolerance, free of bigotry toward those whose opinions or practices differ from our own. But learning to live with significant differences requires much more than tolerance. Dr. Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian President's special envoy to the Middle East and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, made this

point in an address to the faculty and students at Brigham Young University. Relying on the teachings of the Qur'an, he said:

*We must respect this God-given dignity in every human being, even in our enemies. For the goal of all human relations — whether they are religious, social, political, or economic — ought to be cooperation and mutual respect.*

Thus, he added, "We must go ... beyond tolerance if we are to achieve harmony in the world."<sup>[10]</sup> Obviously, followers of Christ also have a duty to seek harmony. Where there are conflicts, all should seek peace.

Far from being a weakness, reconciling adverse positions through respectful negotiation is a virtue. As Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>[11]</sup> The Apostle Paul followed this by teaching Christians to "follow after the things which make for peace,"<sup>[12]</sup> and "[i]f it be possible ... live peaceably with all men."<sup>[13]</sup> Similarly, the Book of Mormon teaches that it is a "peaceable walk with the children of men" that distinguishes a true follower of Jesus Christ.<sup>[14]</sup>

Such teachings impose duties and can create tensions that I will now address. On this subject I counsel my fellow Latter-day Saints specifically, but also request the consideration of those who share our belief in the Bible, and even those who only embrace its wisdom. I will illustrate some of my points with the experience of the Latter-day Saints because I believe the lessons we have learned from that experience are applicable to any who seek to obey both the law of the land and the law of their God, even in circumstances of extreme tension.

#### IV.

What I have described as necessary to going forward — namely seeking harmony by finding practical solutions to our differences, with love and respect for all people — does not require any compromise of core principles. Both religious and secular rule are ordained of God for the good of His children. As is generally known, Jesus taught this during His ministry. Some who sought to trap Him asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. They wanted to force him to declare publicly that his followers were not subject to the civil law. Instead, using a coin of the Roman overseer as a visual aid, Jesus answered, "Render [meaning give] ... unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."<sup>[15]</sup>

The religious duty to obey the law of the land and to live peaceably with all people does not contemplate that the religious will abandon the public square. In a free society like ours, all are lawfully privileged and morally obligated to exert their best political efforts to argue for what they think is most desirable. For example, it is well-known that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints exercised its constitutional right to express its position that the traditional legal definition of marriage should be preserved. But in 2015, when the Supreme Court pronounced the legality of same-sex marriage, the Church immediately ceased all such opposition, and publicly acknowledged its acceptance of the constitutional law established by the nation's highest court.<sup>[16]</sup>

Of course, a church's *religious* marriage law and practice, which upholds the Biblical understanding of marriage, remains in force on its adherents when it does not violate what Jesus called Caesar's law. Joseph Smith, for whom this lecture is named, taught that "religion is instituted of God; and that



men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberty of others.”[17]

Therefore, notwithstanding its heavily criticized opposition in the political debate over same-sex marriage, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reached out to nondiscrimination advocates and participated in Utah negotiations over shared concerns on housing and employment. The discussions that followed were previously thought impossible for either side. Over a six-year period, however, they were able to craft suitable local and statewide legislation because adversaries gradually learned to understand each other’s positions, including what they deemed most important to affirm and protect by law. One participant told me that he recalls them as “an effort in peacemaking, learning how to live together” with mutual respect, even love.

At issue was a head-to-head conflict between free exercise of religion and nondiscrimination in housing and employment in a Salt Lake City ordinance first proposed in 2009. In time, a jointly designed proposal gained traction, and its adoption at the city level prompted an effort to adopt a similar law statewide. The resulting law, later called “the Utah Compromise,” was enacted with the Church’s full support in 2015. This law offered protections to both sides. One side obtained significant legal protection from discrimination in employment and housing. The other side gained protection for religious freedom in its most sensitive areas of Church employment and student housing. While the law gave neither side all that it sought, its reconciliations did grant both sides significant benefits — a win-win outcome — that could not have been obtained without the balancing of interests made possible by the dynamics of the legislative process.

In contrast to the tendencies of the judicial branch to decide complex issues in a winner-take-all adversarial process, the legislative process in Utah provided an opportunity to forge enduring relationships and to craft workable long-term solutions. Here is how Troy Williams, executive director of Equality Utah, described the process:

*We found solutions together. Neither side compromised our values, but rather, we discovered new ways forward that respected each other and forged areas of common ground. Bringing diverse voices to the table is hard. It requires expanded empathy and patience. But when we ratchet down the vitriol and seek areas of agreement, incredible things can happen.*[18]

The resulting “Utah Compromise” on housing and employment was a pathbreaking beginning that has been embraced by all parties, including the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As a Church, we are committed to the free exercise of religion to allow us to practice the principles of our faith. But we are also committed to fundamental fairness and the rule of law. We see the process that succeeded in Utah as a promising way to have both religious protection and fundamental fairness, particularly on individual issues like housing and employment. Whether it can be applied to other sensitive issues remains to be seen.

In this regard, I must add that the Utah Compromise required more than political engagement. Essential to our side was the principle of honoring both divine and mortal laws. Rendering to Caesar *in good faith* requires religious persons and associations to acknowledge what their government does for them and to be faithful in fulfilling the reciprocal responsibilities they owe to the government and their fellow citizens. All should observe the laws and respect the values of the country that guarantees their freedoms. This is a debt of gratitude that should be paid gladly.

But what if neither side to a controversy over religious freedom and nondiscrimination can make the concessions necessary to reconcile their differences? On a broader front, what if the conflicting demands of civil and religious law are such that they cannot be resolved by negotiation? Such circumstances rarely exist. If they do, the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints suggests that a way can be found to reconcile divine and human law — through patience, negotiation, and mutual accommodation, without judicial fiat or other official coercion.

That was the outcome of the painful, nationally debated contest over seating Latter-day Saint Apostle Reed Smoot in the United States Senate in 1903. I do not have time to tell the story of this four-year Senate hearing, but recommend it to you as a fascinating account of a political negotiation which, according to a brilliant scholarly analysis by your own Kathleen Flake, “hammered out a twentieth-century model for church-state relations, shaping for a new generation of Americans what it meant to be free and religious.”[19] Where coercive efforts against a church (by mob violence, public shaming, military might, statutory criminalization, and even disincorporation) had failed, politics — “the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best”[20] — finally succeeded, and one of its leaders was seated in the Senate.

Mutual accommodation between the Latter-day Saints and the rest of the country was achieved by adversarial parties who were able, by political means, to identify and “preserve the deepest interests of the greatest number of parties.”[21] That is the essence of constructive politics, which is something to be emulated in our own day. Indeed, the terms for maintaining a workable relationship between church and state that emerged from the Smoot hearings are applicable to all sides today: obedience to the law, political toleration and commitment to the common good. United States history is replete with failures and successes in protecting religious and other civil rights. Let us hope that current efforts will add another success to the troubled history of the intersection of divine and civil law.

## V.

In the meantime, religious leaders must not overlook the fact that the preservation of religious freedom ultimately depends on public appreciation and support for the related First Amendment freedoms of religious conscience, association, and free exercise. In turn, such appreciation and support depends on the value the public attaches to the positive effects of the practices and teachings in churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship. Those effects include their encouraging observance of civil law and church-goers’ improved health and longevity recently highlighted in a cover story in Christianity Today.[22]

Teachings based on faith in God — however defined — have always contributed to moral actions that benefit the entire nation. This will continue to be so as religious people love and serve their neighbors as an expression of their love of God. As Lance B. Wickman, general counsel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, recently observed:

*When we exercise our religious freedom to serve and lift to strengthen community ties and to pour oil on troubled waters, and to make America better — when we use our religious freedom to bring people together in unity and love — we are defending and preserving religious liberty and the Constitution in a most profound way.[23]*

In this way, more than any other, the importance of religious freedom will be better understood and better protected.

I earnestly invite all religious leaders and associations to coalesce more effectively — and that often means out of court — to seek peaceful resolution of painful conflicts between religious freedom and nondiscrimination. This does not require an examination of doctrinal differences or even our many common elements of belief. All that is necessary for unity and a broad coalition to promote our common need for religious freedom is our shared conviction that God has commanded us to love one another, including our neighbors with different beliefs and cultures.[24] This invites all believers, as President Russell M. Nelson has challenged our members, to “expand our circle of love to embrace the whole human family.”[25]

In doing so, we must not allow fears about losing our own freedoms make us insensitive to others’ claims for theirs. Let us unite with those who advocate nondiscrimination to seek a culture and laws that respect the rights of all to the equal protection of the law and the right to the free exercise of religion. From the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints I believe we can proceed toward this goal by mutual respect and willing accommodation. The right relationship between religious freedom and nondiscrimination is best achieved by respecting each other enough to negotiate in good faith and by caring for each other enough that the freedom and protection we seek is not for ourselves alone. I pray for that result under our inspired Constitution, as we pledge to be “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[1] See Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 105-108.

[2] Arthur C. Brooks, “More Love, Less Contempt,” Brigham Young University commencement address, April 25, 2019; *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt* (New York: Broadside Books, 2019).

[3] “RFRA’s under attack,” *Deseret News National Weekly Edition*, April 12, 2015, 12.

[4] Opinion: “The world lost a moral voice, but Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ wisdom lives on,” *Deseret News*, Nov. 13, 2020.

[5] *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203, 212 (1948); *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 16, 18 (1948). See *The Wall Between Church and State* (D. Oaks, ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

[6] 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

[7] See Steven H. Arden and Lee J. Strang, “When a ‘Rule’ Doesn’t Rule: The failure of the Oregon Employment Division v. Smith ‘Hybrid Rights Exception,’” 108 *Penn. St. L. Rev.* 573 (2003).

[8] Martha Minow, *Should Religious Groups Be Exempt from Civil Rights Law?*, 48 *B.C.L. Rev.* 781, 849 (2007).

[9] *Id.*, at 783.

[10] Alwi Shihab, *Building Bridges to Harmony Through Understanding* (forum address at Brigham Young University, Oct. 10, 2006), <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=11324&x=60&y=5>.

[11] Matthew 5:9.

[12] Romans 14:19.

[13] Romans 12:18.

[14] Moroni 7:4.

[15] Matthew 22:21; Luke 12:17; Luke 20:25.

[16] Tad Walch, "What the LDS Church said about the Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage," *The Deseret News*, June 29, 2015.

[17] Doctrine and Covenants, 134:4.

[18] *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 25, 2021, A7.

[19] Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity*, 11 (University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[20] Otto von Bismark, in conversation with Friedrich Meyer von Waldeck of the St. Petersburgische Zeitung (11 Aug. 1867), W. Andreas (ed.) *Gesammelt Werke*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Stollberg, 1924), 222.

[21] Flake at note 19 supra, p. 10; also see pp. 8-9 and 50-51.

[22] "Empty Pews Are an American Public Health Crisis," *Christianity Today*, October 19, 2021; see <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/church-empty-pews-are-american-public-health-crisis.html>.


[23] Lance B. Wickman, "Shrapnel in a Bible: Reflections on Patriotism, Charity and Religious Liberty," St. George [Utah] Interfaith Devotional, July 4, 2021.

[24] E.g., Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:29.

[25] Russell M. Nelson, *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson*, (2018), 83.

# CHANGED

#ONCEGAY STORIES

Attachment 



## Can a person leave homosexuality behind?

"CHANGED" began as an effort to highlight the uncommon journeys of men and women who have confronted this question in their own lives. Finding themselves sexually attracted to the same sex, or uncertain of their gender, the men and women featured in this book took unusual paths of self-discovery that led to transformation.

Today, many face this daunting question alone. Sometimes answers seem beyond reach. You are not alone.

We are a growing community of men and women who have explored the depths of our identities and found wholeness. We have confronted the pain, rejection, and despair that often accompany the homosexual experience; and so our approach is sensitive. Compassionate. Genuine.

This is an invitation to go deeper. To find meaning in the journey. And to embrace process. We have looked beyond the cultural labels and expectations and found lasting fulfillment.

Inside this book are vulnerable, authentic and sometimes raw accounts of the hope and prosperity all of our journeys offered as we questioned our sexuality and gender identity.

We are changed.

## THANK YOU

...to every person who has shared their story for the creation of this book.  
Your courage and vulnerability are remarkable.



“

There was no manipulation or shame, just unconditional love.

LIZ FLAHERTY

**M**y family moved to a small California town when I was young. I faced a lot of rejection growing up there for multiple reasons, one being that I was overweight and the other that I was a Christian. Attempting to fit in, I continually sought out romantic relationships, smoked pot, and abused alcohol. With plummeting self-worth, I gave myself to any guy willing to give me attention.

During high school, I found my relationships with men to be shallow and became calloused towards them. I found my relationships with women to be much deeper and more fulfilling. I'd experienced same-sex attraction from a young age but hadn't talked to anyone about it.

One night as I sat with my friends, I had what I believed was my grand epiphany: I was a lesbian. I thought the pieces of my puzzle were coming together.

In college, I joined an LGBTQ community and separated myself completely from my religious upbringing. I believed I had been liberated and could pursue what I know was best for me. Even with this new "liberation," I was still experiencing tremendous pain and depression, which led to medicating myself.

One afternoon as I was high, I became greatly aware of the severity of my depression and feeling of disconnection from God. I began to pray, "I'm not sure if it's okay to talk to you when I'm high, but I can't get myself out of this." Suddenly,

I was overwhelmed with the feeling that God truly loved me. For the next few days, I tried to resume my regular routine; however, when I went to smoke again, I felt like I was going to die. I didn't want to quit, but eventually I realized that, clearly, I was to follow a different path going forward.

After this experience, I renewed my focus on my faith in God, including how it related to my sexuality. And even in the midst of all that, I continued to experience same-sex attraction.

After searching to understand my same-sex attraction, I was introduced to a sexual wholeness program that emphasized finding your true identity. It was led by a married couple who had walked through similar struggles. The group met once a week and formed a loving environment where we could open up, receive encouragement, and seek healing. These leaders let us be our messy selves, all the while helping us to grow. There was no manipulation or shame, just unconditional love. In that season of my life, I grew to understand where my desires and attractions came from and how to get deep emotional needs met in an appropriate and effective way.

These days, same-sex attraction no longer drives me. I know who I am and have a tremendous amount of peace and joy. I've been married to a wonderful man for 14 years now. I'm no longer in the painful cycle of trying to fulfill my needs through same-sex relationships with women.

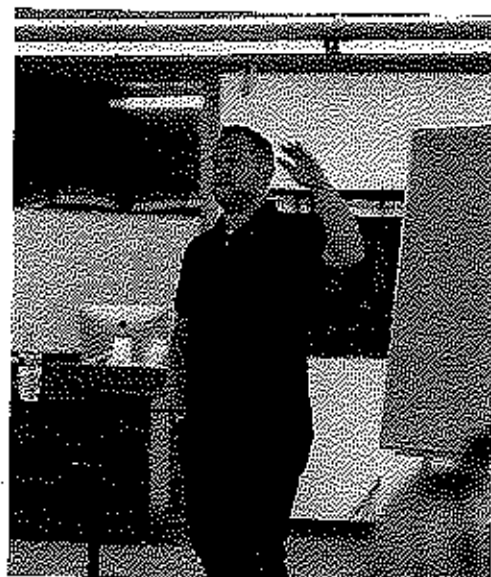
LIZ G. FLAHERTY  
lizgflaherty.com



LIZ FLAHERTY



# DREW BERRYESSA



A LIVING LETTER MINISTRIES  
[alivingletter.org](http://alivingletter.org)

CHANGED

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No one there was trying to coerce me into changing my behavior, but they helped me pursue a healthy heart and lifestyle.

DREW BERRYESSA

I lived in what felt like a secret prison of hopelessness and helplessness. I was addicted to pornography and masturbation, and I had a really hard time making friends. I also dealt with same-sex attraction and felt extremely internally conflicted and frustrated about it. I had no idea what to do with my struggles.

At my lowest point, I was in despair and had no hope that things could change. I started to believe that gay love was better than no love at all, and I entered into a gay relationship. For a few months it felt fulfilling, but then I quickly realized it wasn't what others had made it out to be.

Realizing that even that relationship wouldn't meet my heart's desire or satisfy me, I considered suicide. I saw no way forward, but I didn't go through with it.

I wanted to have a family someday, to be married to a woman, and have kids although I honestly didn't think it would be possible for me. And I always had a deep feeling that same-sex attraction was not what was best for me. I struggled to reconcile my feelings and my faith. These were the two main motivators for me to pursue change.

There were many things that helped my process, including an album of a worship leader who shared his story of coming out of homosexuality. It was the first time I'd ever heard a testimony like it, and it gave me hope. There were also books of others'

stories of leaving homosexual lifestyles that encouraged me.

I then joined a program that offered specific counseling and pastoral care for people who struggled with their sexuality. No one there was trying to coerce me into changing my behavior, but they helped me pursue a healthy heart and lifestyle, which then led me to change my behavior, as well. The people there encouraged me and helped me see who I really was. That meant letting go of the ways the rejection, abuse, and struggle had affected my view of myself.

Now I have been married for almost 16 years to my wife, and I am the father of three beautiful daughters. These are two roles that I never thought I would be able to have. I now get to experience them every single day, and it's amazing.

I have an immense number of healthy, supportive friendships, and I have had reconciliation with each of my family members whom I felt isolated from in the past. I'm happy, successful, and excited about life.

I'm looking forward to watching my own daughters grow and eventually get married and to being a grandpa. I'm looking forward, on a really immediate level, to my youngest going to school next year so that my wife can be freed up a little bit more. Those are all the sweet little mundane things about family life that I never would have had the opportunity to look forward to had this not happened in my life.

“

God enabled me to love myself exactly as I was before I experienced any change in my sexuality.

CHRISTOPHER SIMS

I was raised in a severely abusive Christian home. Abuse and pornography were secrets I was used to hearing. Being attracted to guys was also a secret I carried and felt ashamed of, and, though I hid my sexual attractions, people still called me gay and mistreated me because I was effeminate.

I could handle being mistreated, but feeling like God didn't like me was unbearable. By the age of eighteen, I stopped pursuing a relationship with God, came out, and was celebrated.

That year, I fell deeper into porn addiction, online sex chatting and gender dysphoria. I learned to live from the affirmation I got from closeted alpha male types who were attracted to me.

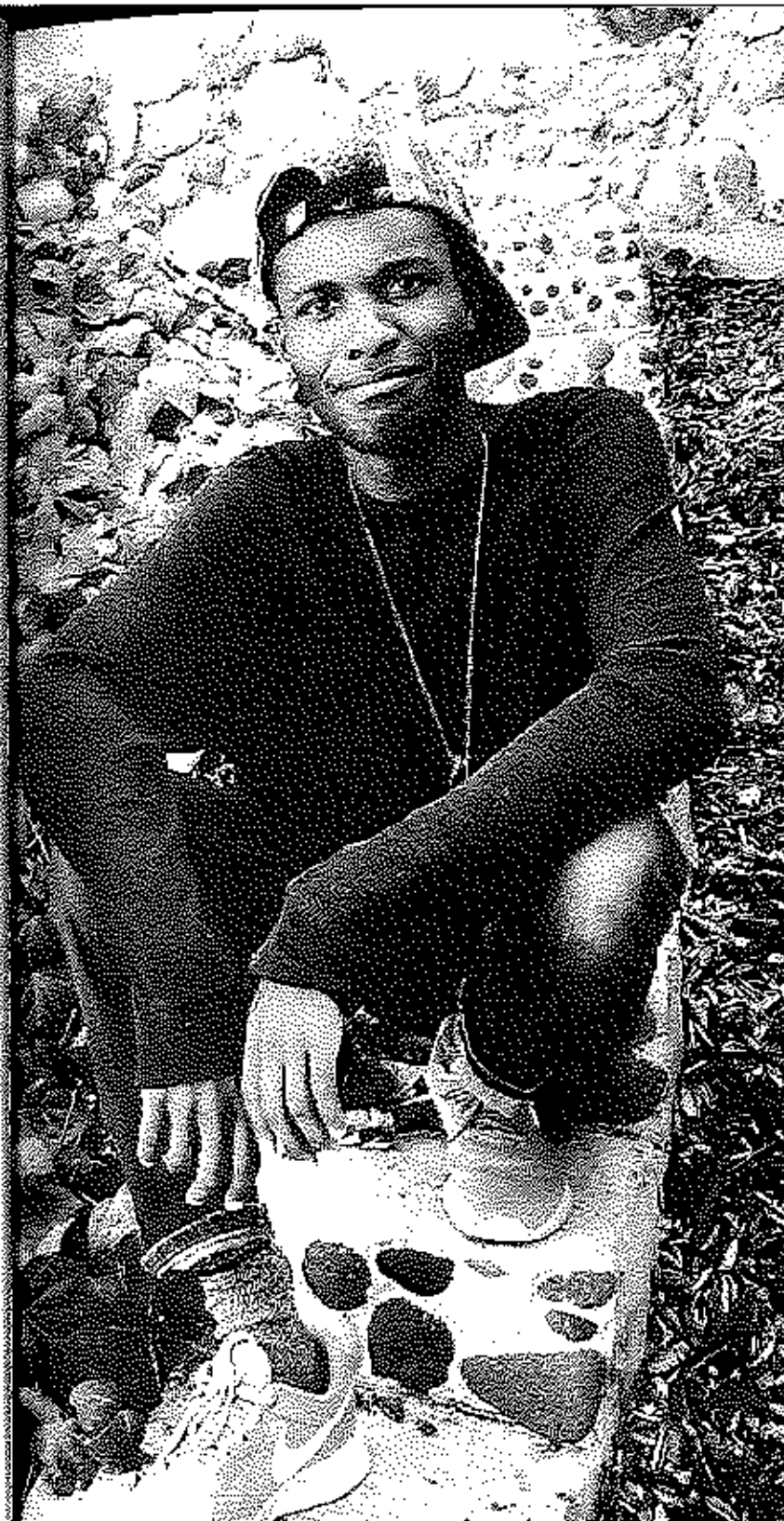
My lowest point in life was a recurring experience that hit me every time I felt like I wasn't pleasing or good enough, or when I felt like a failure as a man. This happened whenever emotional situations or even non-sexual physical touch triggered my memories of the abuse, leaving me panicked and ashamed. I decided to seek change in my life because I realized that I was too broken to be intimate with anyone. I needed professional help.

**I absolutely  
love my life  
today.**

In addition to getting counseling for childhood abuse, I cried out to God for help saying, "Everyone who told me about You was a hypocrite, but I want to know You for who You really are." Then I heard His voice answer in my heart, "Christopher, I love you." I was convinced. I felt it. I wept because I finally knew that God not only loved me, He liked me! God enabled me to love myself exactly as I was before I experienced any change in my sexuality.

Today my sexual attractions to men are gone. I am attracted to women, and I have not watched pornography in six years. I experienced these changes as a result of finding real friendship with God, forgiving everyone who abused me, and surrounding myself with a healthy, loving Christian community, especially other guys.

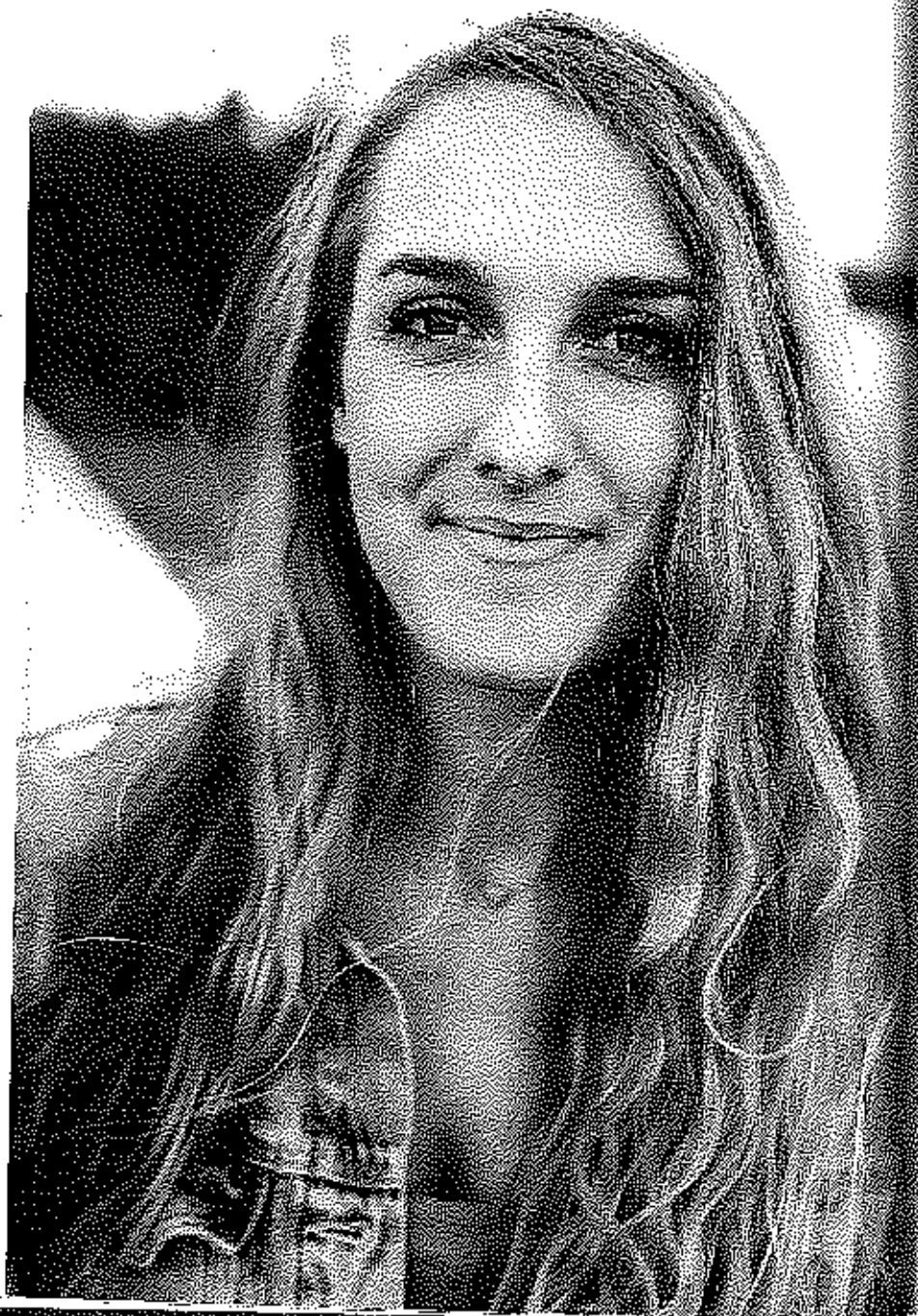
I even used to struggle with seeing myself as a woman. Now, I see myself as a man and enjoy being a man. I used to feel filthy and full of shame, but now I feel clean and live entirely shame-free. I absolutely love my life today, and I am passionate about bringing hope and encouragement to others.



CHRISTOPHER  
SIMS



# BREE STEVENS



CHANGED

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Counseling helped me revisit the sexual assault. I discovered that it was linked to all my health issues, PTSD, and same-sex attraction.

BREE STEVENS

**W**hen I was fifteen, I was blindsided by sexual assault. For years afterward I battled depression, self-hatred, self-harm, pornography and masturbation, fear of men, and PTSD. I was terrified of revisiting the incident, so I suppressed it and went on medication to cope with my health and psychological issues.

In college I met a girl who, to this day, is my best friend. Our friendship developed quickly, and we became extremely close. Although we'd suffered different forms of abuse, we became the answer to each other's pain, and the emotional intimacy we shared turned sexual.

I could never fully reconcile with identifying as lesbian or bisexual, yet I couldn't deny that I was in a same-sex relationship with my best friend. I hated what we were doing in secret, and I never found lasting fulfillment. The escape I sought from my sexual trauma by being with her was short-lived and only reinforced the disconnect I felt toward men. I convinced myself it was just a phase that would go away on its own, but three years later we were still stuck in a secret that was increasingly hard to hide. I actually felt empty and more isolated than before we became friends.

The turning point for me happened when I woke up next to her one morning and saw two versions of my life flash before my eyes. In one future, I saw myself living an openly gay lifestyle and married to her; behind me was a completely severed relationship with my family. In the next future, I saw

us standing beside each other and married, but not to each other. Our husbands, kids, and families surrounded us. We were in love with our husbands and more satisfied with them than we ever were with each other, and my relationship with my parents was restored. In that moment I heard Jesus say to me, "You can be with your best friend forever. Whichever way you choose, I promise you, I will never leave you. But, if you choose a relationship with her, you will leave Me." I couldn't bear the thought of leaving Jesus. I know He was telling me the truth.

So I chose. She chose. We both wanted the second future, so we asked people in our church for help. The thought of opening up about our closeted relationship was terrifying,

but they embraced us. I got pastoral counseling and read books about finding freedom in my sexuality. Counseling helped me revisit the sexual assault, and I discovered that it was linked to all my health issues, PTSD, and same-sex attraction. Within months, my PTSD symptoms dissipated. I went off medication, and the sexual draw I had toward her began to change. She went through her own healing process too, and we've been healthy and free for four years now. The sexual tension and codependency are gone. We love our friendship this way.

Today, I feel whole. I feel safe around men again, and it is no longer difficult to look them in the eyes. I am even looking forward to dating guys; something I have not felt in years. I love my body now and feel deeply restored.

**Today, I feel whole.**

“

I had been wanting to pursue change for quite some time before the tragedy at Pulse happened.

## ANGEL COLON

My life before I pursued change in my sexuality was what I would call “a hot mess.” Lonely, empty, unhappy, shackled, and unloved were the ways I felt for eight years after I came out. The more unhappy I was, the worse it got. My life was so consumed by homosexuality, drugs and liquor that I wouldn’t give the time of day to my family. Having been raised in a strong Christian home, I felt a deep conflict between what I had known to be good and right, and the life I was living.

I woke up hungover on June 11th, 2016, after a night of drinking and drug use. That evening my friends and I went to Pulse, a club in Orlando. At 2:02 a.m. everything changed. While saying our goodbyes, we heard a big POP! I dropped my drink, realizing the sounds were gunshots. As we ran, I was shot several times and fell down, pulling my friends with me. Struggling to stand back up, I felt a foot step behind my left leg and heard a loud snap which resulted in my left femur breaking. I couldn’t move or even feel my legs, so I covered my head and stayed still. What followed was chaos all around me. I started comforting the lady lying next to me, whispering to her to pretend to be dead. I looked at her and heard a loud shot. As her eyes shut,

I couldn’t believe I just witnessed her death. I was terrified I would be next. Feeling the shooter behind me, I uttered what I thought would be my last prayer. Even in that terrible moment, the peace and hope of God flooded me. I heard a loud shot and felt my body jump up and down. I thought I was dead. After several minutes, I started hearing cop radios. I raised my hands, calling out: “Please come get me! I’m alive!”

I had been wanting to pursue change for quite some time before the tragedy at Pulse happened. I missed my faith, and I missed feeling true peace and happiness. I had started praying for God to do something to change my life. As I recovered, the support of my pastors became a lifeline. I found that I could talk to them about

anything without judgment or rejection and receive counsel and help. Since they earned my trust, I’ve been able to embrace crucial help and resources to aid me in rediscovering my life and faith. I’m still recovering but very grateful I am here today. My life now is a complete 180 from the life I had before.

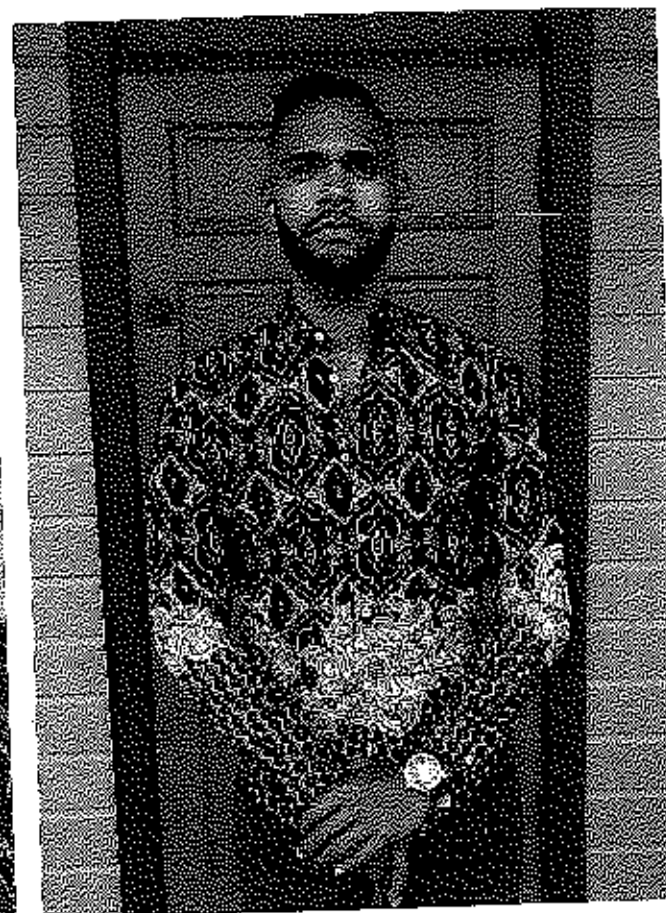
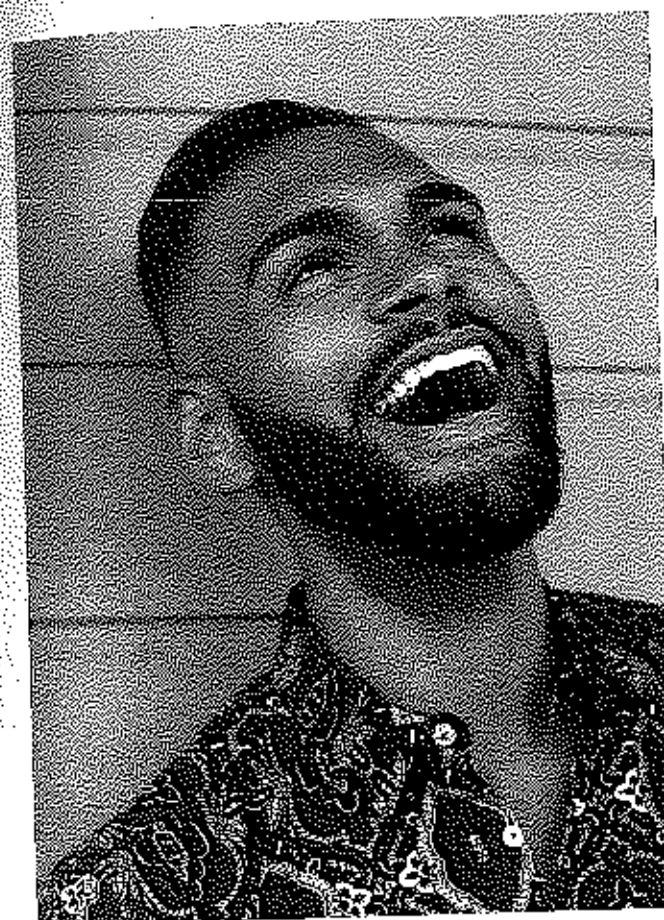
Feeling empty and lonely inside was slowly destroying me, but I can now say I know what true happiness is, what true love is, and most importantly what true peace is.

**I can now say I know what true happiness is, what true love is, and most importantly, what true peace is.**

CHANGED

# ANGEL COLON

*Orlando Pulse Nightclub Shooting Survivor*



**FEARLESS IDENTITY**  
[fearlessidentity.co](http://fearlessidentity.co)



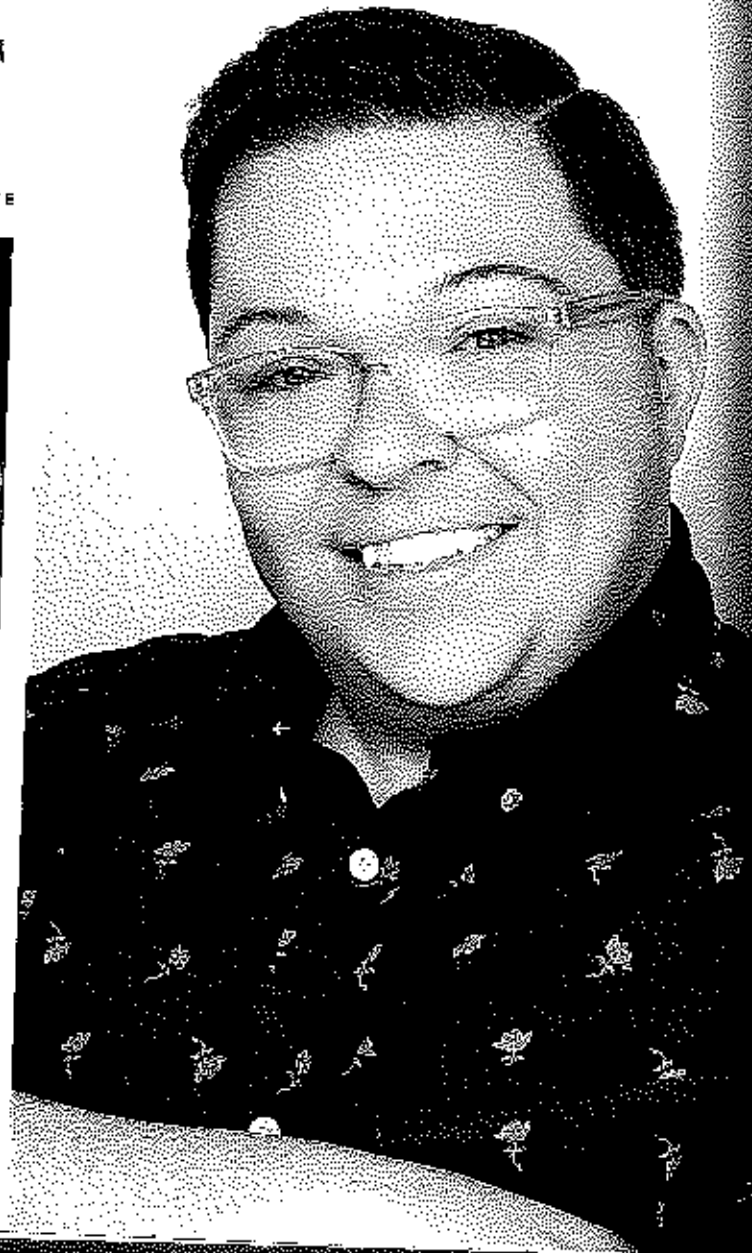
# KEVIN WHITT

KEVIN AS A TRANSEXUAL PROSTITUTE



22

TODAY



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I did not come to Christ seeking change in my sexuality.  
I simply came to Him with the desire for a healthy life.  
He did the rest.

KEVIN WHITT

I grew up in a dysfunctional home with a very abusive father. As a child, I endured verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. In the 1st grade, everyone called me “gay” and “faggot” because I seemed more feminine than other boys. Words are powerful, and I believed those lies. I began having same-sex attraction at a young age, and, by age 15, I came out and started dressing in drag. I was embraced and accepted into a community of people that I could relate to, and the situation and recognition of dressing in drag became addictive.

As soon as I was old enough, I got into the club scene as an entertainer. Desperate for money, I started working in the adult industry as a transsexual prostitute, phone sex operator, dominatrix, and webcam “model.” I thought this would be temporary, but earning over \$1k a day became addictive and I couldn’t stop. Men made me feel sexy and wanted.

I hated Christians because all I’d ever been taught by the Church was that gay people were going to hell and their punishment from God was to contract AIDS and die. So, I figured, if I’m going to hell, I might as well have fun doing it.

Eventually I realized how toxic and addictive my lifestyle had become. Many friends and acquaintances had died young from HIV, and I saw others ruin their lives with drug and

alcohol addictions.

One day, while working in a male strip club, one of the stripper boys invited me to go to church. I thought it was weird, but I was open to it and I went. That day a seed was planted in my heart.

A few months later, I got invited to church on Easter Sunday. God grabbed my attention through a modern-day version of the resurrection of Christ being played out on stage, and I began to cry. I saw all that Jesus had done for me. That was the first day of my walk with Christ.

Eventually my desires to do drag, party, or have sex lessened. God began speaking to me and I got rid of all of my female clothing and accessories. My heart began to change dramatically as God continued to show me my true identity. I did not come to Christ seeking change in my sexuality. I simply came to Him with the desire for a healthy life, and kept an open mind and loving heart. He did the rest.

I now understand that my sensitivity and interests in art, fashion, and beauty do not equate to homosexuality. American culture places a stigma on men. If we don’t watch football and act a certain way, we must be gay. But that is a lie. I am created in God’s image, and He gave me a creative mind. I love being a man just the way I was designed to be.

**I love being  
a man just  
the way I was  
designed to be.**

23

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One book I read about a guy coming out of homosexuality changed my life.

ANDREW FRANKLIN

In 2006, I was fresh out of college. I had a career in musical theater in New York City. I was gay-identified, and I was sexually addicted. I went to auditions, occasionally did shows and regularly dated men. I was sexually involved with other men and had many one night stands, through Craigslist or other ways. I was in relationship after relationship that failed and had hookup after hookup that just made me feel bad about myself and the choices I was making. But it was what all my friends were doing. It was just life.

My lowest point came after a party that I had gone to one night with a few friends. I had gotten drunk and done drugs, so when I woke up the next morning, I didn't remember anything from the night before. I just felt really bad about whatever had happened. I called some friends and found out that I had disrespected my friends in really bad ways and sexually assaulted another man. That's when I knew what I was doing with my life wasn't working. I had to do something.

I began pursuing Christian faith shortly after that, but I didn't know how that was supposed to help me with my sexuality. A friend recommended I talk with a pastoral caregiver, who had also come out of homosexuality, and I met with him weekly for the next several years. He helped me to understand why I was feeling the same sex attraction, why I had always felt different as a boy and as a man than the other

"normal" guys. I began to understand the reasons why.

One book in particular about a guy coming out of homosexuality changed my life. It resonated with me to hear someone else's story of being gay identified, and it gave me a vision for having intimate relationships that weren't toxic like the ones I used to have. I also attended a support group for men struggling with unwanted same sex attraction, heterosexual sexual addiction, and pornography addiction. I was known there, and I learned how to live honestly.

Today I am no longer sexually addicted. I've been sober from sexual addiction for about 13 years now. I realized my pursuit of sex with men actually came from deep emotional needs. I've found that having healthy, platonic relationships with them

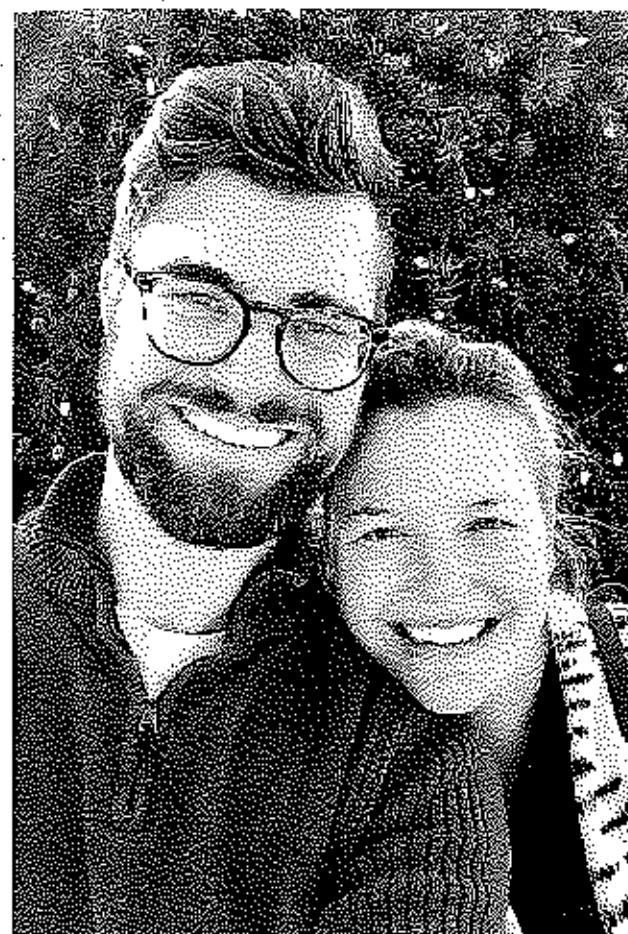
is much more fulfilling than having sexual encounters with them.

Several years after making these life changes, I met a woman from my church who is now my wife. We've been married for five years and have three children. I have crazy, amazing children and a fulfilling marriage, and I'm learning how to best love her and make her feel safe and come alive. I'm a counseling pastor now, and I meet with many individuals and help them. My life looks drastically different than it did 13 years ago, and I'm so thankful for that.

**It resonated with me to hear someone else's story.**

CHANGED

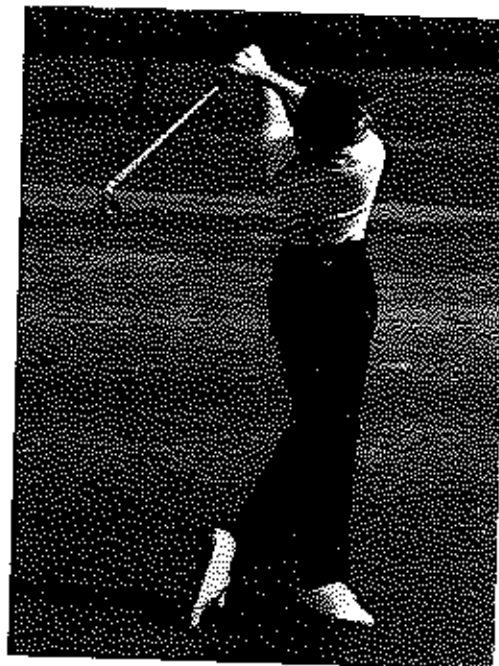
# ANDREW FRANKLIN



ANTIOCH NORMAN  
[antiochnorman.com](http://antiochnorman.com)



# KRIS OLSEN



COMING OUT AGAIN  
[comingoutagain.org](http://comingoutagain.org)

CHANGING

66

I needed a counselor, someone who could help me unravel the deep emotions.

KRIS OLSEN

I was attracted emotionally to other girls in junior high school. In my late teens, I started feeling physically attracted to girls. I never gay-identified, as I didn't like the feelings and wanted them to go away. I was frustrated, had no idea where the attraction was coming from, and wanted nothing to do with it.

In my early 30s, I had a powerful encounter with Jesus and received him as my Savior. I thought that as a Christian, I would not experience same-sex attraction anymore. But although I wasn't acting on it at all, it did not go away. I'm a member of the LPGA and was so focused on my career that attractions faded to the background.

About ten years after becoming a Christian, while in a business meeting, I looked across the room and made eye contact with a woman. I was immediately attracted to her, and I could see in her eyes that she was extremely attracted to me, too. I didn't want to pursue anything with her, so I resolved to keep my distance.

A couple of months later in another business meeting, she sat down next to me. She asked how I was doing, and I ended up unloading all of my work-related frustrations and struggles on her. She offered to help me because she'd had similar experiences, so I agreed. We struck up a friendship, which became a relationship, and I entered into the world of lesbian

sexuality. She was practically my dream girl, but all along, I felt unsettled about it and very internally conflicted.

She wasn't a Christian, and I was. One day as we sat in my car talking, I mentioned a biblical concept that applied to our topic of conversation. I said, "there's this Scripture in the Bible that says..." I barely finished when she turned to me and said, "Shut up! I'm so tired of hearing about Jesus. If you mention Him one more time, I'm out of this car and you'll never see me again."

Suddenly, I knew I was at a crossroads of choosing my faith or her. In that moment, I chose my faith.

It was the hardest decision I had ever made, and I knew I needed serious help to work through it. I needed more than just reading Scripture; I needed a counselor, someone who could help me unravel the deep emotions from a faith-based perspective. I ended up joining a Christian ministry program where I gained understanding about where my same-sex feelings had come from. I also attended a conference and read a couple of books on the topic of transforming unwanted same-sex attraction. All of these things were healing for me.

Today, I'm no longer attracted to women, and I have attraction toward men. I'm currently single, enjoy my freedom and am happy with being released from the intense conflict in my soul over my sexuality.

**I enjoy my freedom and am happy.**

66

I learned how to be a good friend to guys (hard at first) and to love a woman whom I married. Best choice ever.

ANDREW COMISKEY

28

My freedom from the domination of homosexuality began with a revelation of the Cross: God's radical self giving. God gave all and all He asked is that I give Him all. That took time. Young and sexually charged, I found giving up "gay stuff" hard. I knew deep down that my ways were destructive, but I had not enough traction with Christians to discover how divine love could surpass my feelings. I wavered between gay and Christian culture for a while before I "got" the Cross. Surrender to Jesus made the difference.

Second, God showed me I was created in His image—a man intended for a woman. That is an unquestionable truth, but my Bible-toting world stressed what I should not do sexually rather than who I was as God's gendered guy. That invited me to dig deeper into why I was at odds with my masculinity and to get on with the business of relating to women. Gender reconciliation became a priority in my

**God invited me to dig deeper into why I was at odds with my masculinity.**

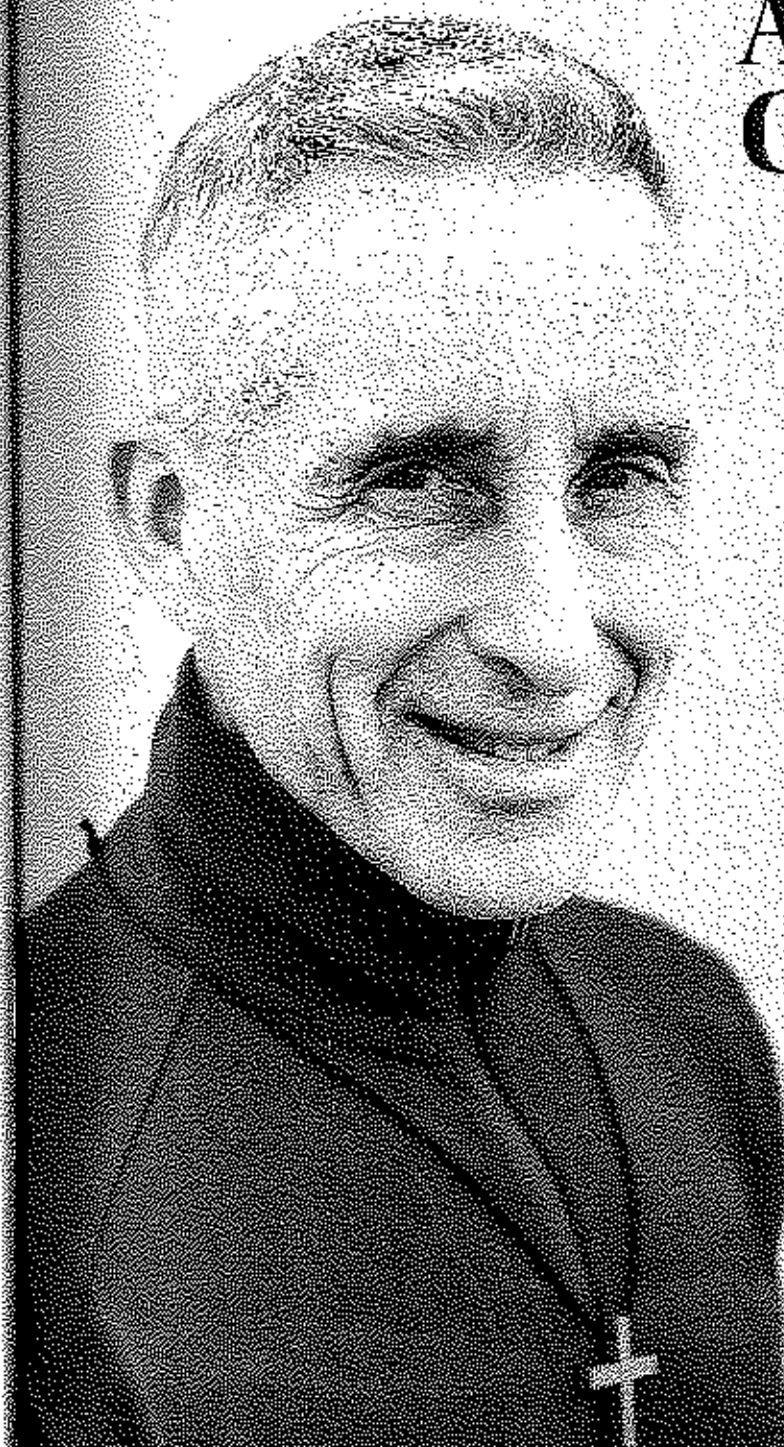
thinking and in my daily decisions. I learned how to be a good friend to guys (hard at first) and to love a woman whom I married. Best choice ever.

I also learned that unless I was rooted in a dynamic community of faith, I would be sucked back into perverting my need for love. I grew to love the real presence of Jesus in His Word and saints, in music, and in our efforts to create a home for Him. As we gathered at the first Vineyard Church in Los Angeles, He deepened authentic worship. There my fiancé and I began to gather with gay-identified persons whom we helped to know Jesus. Together we discovered His strength perfected in weakness. That became the basis for Living Waters, a group I still run as a Catholic in my parish; our groups now flow out to every continent ([desertstream.org](http://desertstream.org)). My well being is bound up in helping make the broken body of Christ beautiful for Jesus.

# ANDREW COMISKEY

DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES

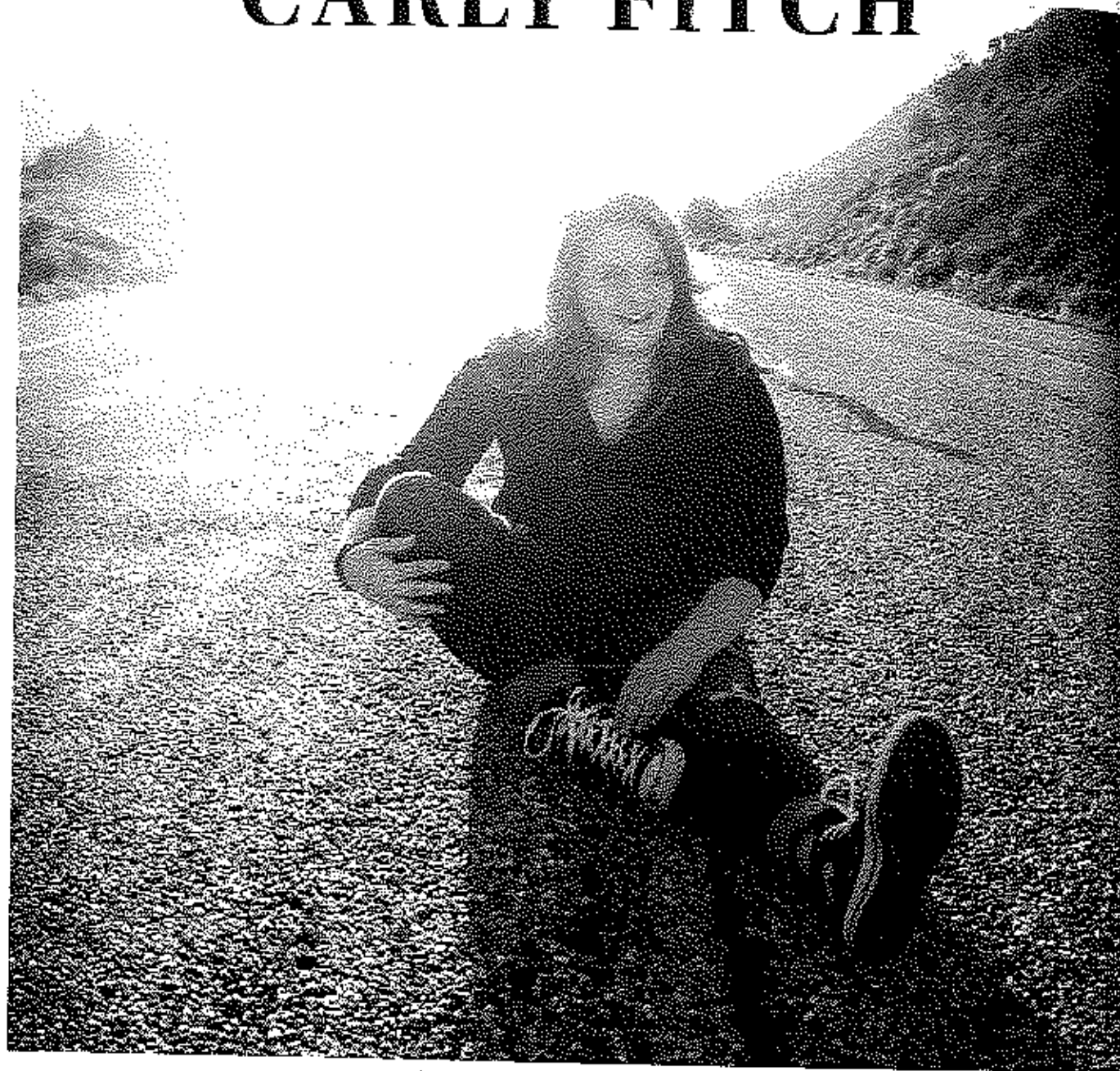
[desertstream.org](http://desertstream.org)



29



# CARLY FITCH



30

CHANGE

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I love the way that I look; I enjoy being a woman and can now express that healthfully.

CARLY FITCH

Starting from a very young age, I experienced a deep desire to be a boy, and as I grew older I was only attracted to females. I looked at guys as my brothers and best friends. Women were what I wanted to cherish, protect and invest my emotions and feelings into; whereas, boys were not a romantic interest whatsoever. In high school, I allowed myself to explore my sexuality and my attraction to women grew.

Eventually, I found myself in a relationship with a woman, whom I wanted to marry. But, my girlfriend broke up with me, and I was left alone. I was so depressed, realizing that I had nothing and that I didn't want the life that I had been living for years. I wanted to die and couldn't see a way out for myself.

In my pain, I started searching for God. I didn't know what else to do, so I asked for His help because I didn't want to live

a lesbian life. I began to go to church and read loads and loads of books on sexuality. I found myself listening to hundreds of different podcasts. While I did that, over the course of about four months, my attraction to women completely disappeared.

**My attraction to women completely disappeared.**

Fast forward to now, three and a half years later, and a lot has changed for me as a woman. I love the way that I look; I love my hair and really enjoy getting dressed up and fancy. I love the fact that my body can birth children. And I have found that I enjoy being a woman all around and can now express that healthfully. I've even found myself dating

men and noticing different things that I desire in my future husband. I'm looking forward to marrying a man and starting a family with him. God led me on a journey that completely changed my life through many different means, and my life has never been better.

31

# HILARY EIRICH

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I felt like I was a prisoner of my own emotions. But I didn't know how to deal with any of it.

HILARY EIRICH

32

I'm a girl, but my whole life I wanted to be a boy. I felt very confused and never felt like I knew who I was. I started using alcohol to help me cope with life, and I was coping in other unhealthy ways, as well.

At one point, I emotionally fell in love with a woman. It was an infatuation, really. It never felt right to me, I was never happy, and I continually had nightmares while I was with her. I had started down this path with her, but I knew I didn't want to fully go down that path. Deep down, I believed that I was created to be a female, who wasn't designed to love another female.

I was also depressed, I had no peace, and I had a ton of anxiety. I felt like I was a prisoner of my own emotions. I was miserable, and I wanted to die. But I didn't know how to deal with any of it.

I eventually decided to stop drinking and partying, and I started seeing a counselor. We were just exploring what was going on, and for the first time, I realized that my confusion about my sexuality was causing all of my acting out even

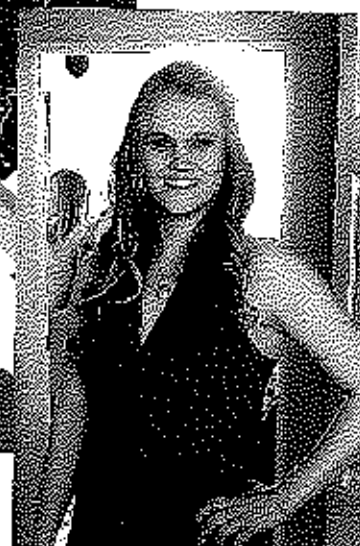
though I had been denying it.

After that, I reached out to a friend who had gone through this process of pursuing sexual wholeness, and she helped me process my next steps. Then my counselor found a faith-based group specifically for people who struggle with their sexuality,

and I attended their 30-week program. We read books that helped us gain perspective on our sexuality and took for dealing with unwanted sexual attractions. The safety of the group gave me the ability to talk freely about it and not feel alone or isolated in my experiences. I drove three hours each way to attend this group every time it met, and it was extremely worthwhile for me because I was feeling free for the first time in my life.

Today, I can truthfully say that I love being a girl. I'm no longer controlled by my sexual desires. I'm newly dating a guy, and I feel more peace within myself than I ever have in my whole life.

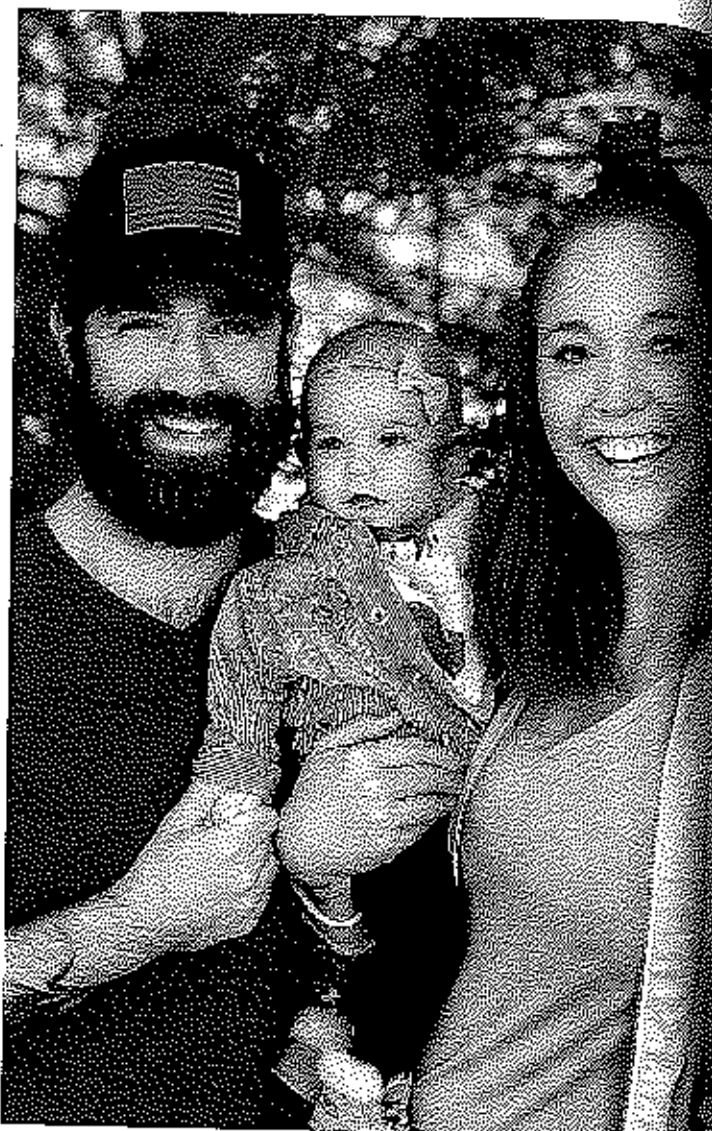
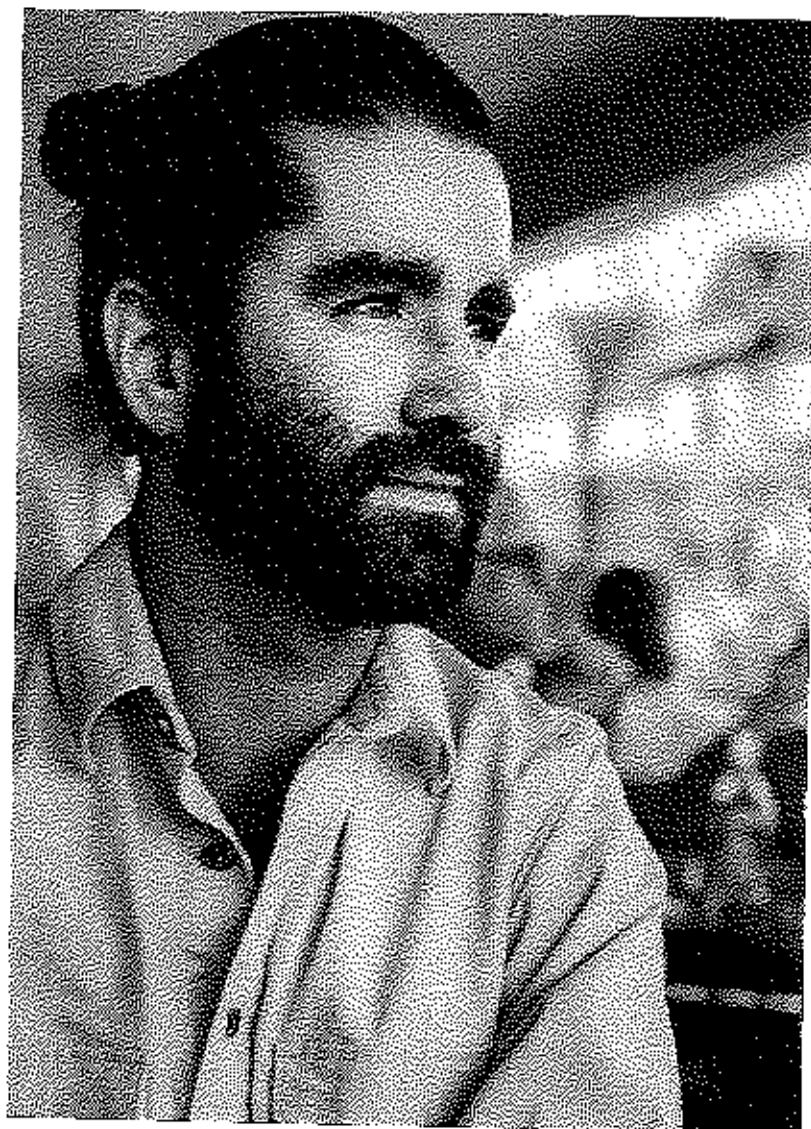
**Today, I can truthfully say that I love being a girl.**



33



# DAVID REECE



TRUE NORTH / [MissionTrueNorth.com](http://MissionTrueNorth.com)

CHANGING

66

I could have come out and said, "I'm going to live a homosexual lifestyle," but I didn't want it.

DAVID REECE

From the time I was age three to seventeen, my life was marked by addiction to pornography, same-sex porn, unhealthy relationships, confused identity and sexual abuse. I lived a duplicitous life with a lot of behind-closed-doors behavior. I seemed like a great kid. No one suspected I was in pain, but I was lonely and confused.

My cousin molested me from age three to sixteen. From the age of four, I was attracted to other boys. In high school, I was addicted to porn and had encounters with other boys, so I thought maybe I was gay. But when a close friend came out, I knew it wasn't what I wanted and made a conscious decision not to go down that path.

In college, I didn't act out in homosexual behavior but used pornography to comfort myself in my loneliness and brokenness. When I met my wife in 2008, she was the first person I was honest with about my lifelong addiction to porn and same-sex attraction. I was very attracted to her, but I didn't know how to reconcile that with the conflict raging within me.

In 2010 we married, and I took my porn addiction into our marriage. By the second year of marriage things got really rough. I knew I desperately needed help. One night a friend told me about a program he was in that was helping him experience healing and understand his sexuality, and he encouraged me to check it out.

That was the turning point for me. Right away I started counseling sessions that helped me get out of pain and confusion and understand that just because I was molested at three didn't mean I was gay. Then I went through a 21-week program directed at sexual brokenness and relational trauma. In 2015, through counseling and the 21-week program, I got freedom and healing from the roots that had been causing all my pain and sexual confusion, and it's been an acceleration ever since.

**I have freedom and clarity.**

Before I walked out of same-sex attraction, I only knew false happiness. Today my life is crazy good and full of joy. For the first time in my life, I have freedom and clarity, and things keep getting clearer every day. I'm finally genuinely connected to myself and others. I have confidence in relationships and in myself, and everything is so much clearer now.

There is no doubt in my mind that if I had not had access to the counseling, books, and programs I went through, it would have been soul-crushing. I could have come out and said, "I'm going to go live a homosexual lifestyle," but I didn't want it. I didn't know what to do, and I was in despair. I had so many thoughts of suicide and so much darkness surrounding my life because it was so lonely and depressing. If I had not had the opportunity to pursue the healing and wholeness I was longing for, I would be dead today.

“

Seeing and knowing other men as human beings instead of sexualizing them has been a life-changing transformation.

DANIEL DELGADO

I was a child of divorce. My father was a violent man; my mother was clinically depressed; and in my adolescence, I was sexually abused. As a child, I wanted to be a girl and hated being a boy.

At 14 years old, a counselor encouraged me to embrace a gay identity. He said things would get better if I did. So during my freshman year of high school, I came out to everyone. But things didn't get better for me.

When I was 16, my suicide attempt was interrupted by a neighbor lady inviting me to church. She later told me the Lord had told her to do so. I found myself surrounded at her church by men, young and old—who were praying for me, moving me to tears by their care for me, and ending my suicidal thoughts that day. But, as powerful as that moment was, I still needed so much healing. My deep need to feel loved and accepted persisted, and I continued to embrace a gay identity.

At age 18, I began living like a woman and even competed

in professional pageantry for about two years. One night, when taking the make up off of my face, I couldn't even recognize myself in the mirror. That terrified me. I had to admit that my efforts to become Miss Gay Texas were leading me nowhere. Many of the men around me were getting sick and dying—I didn't want that to be my story.

**I began to accept and be at home in my own skin as a man.**

On a Sunday night in December, when I was 20 years old, I met Jesus in a very experiential way. I surrendered my life to him. Jesus was and will always be my only hope for real freedom. His Church is my family and my home.

I then began to read many books and attend a program that ministers to those with gender confusion. So many painful issues in my life were addressed there. Over time, I began to accept and be at home in my own skin as a man.

Seeing and knowing other men as human beings instead of sexualizing them has been a life-changing transformation. I'm so thankful for the new life God has given me. Today, I enjoy life and get to point others to the hope I've found.

# DANIEL DELGADO

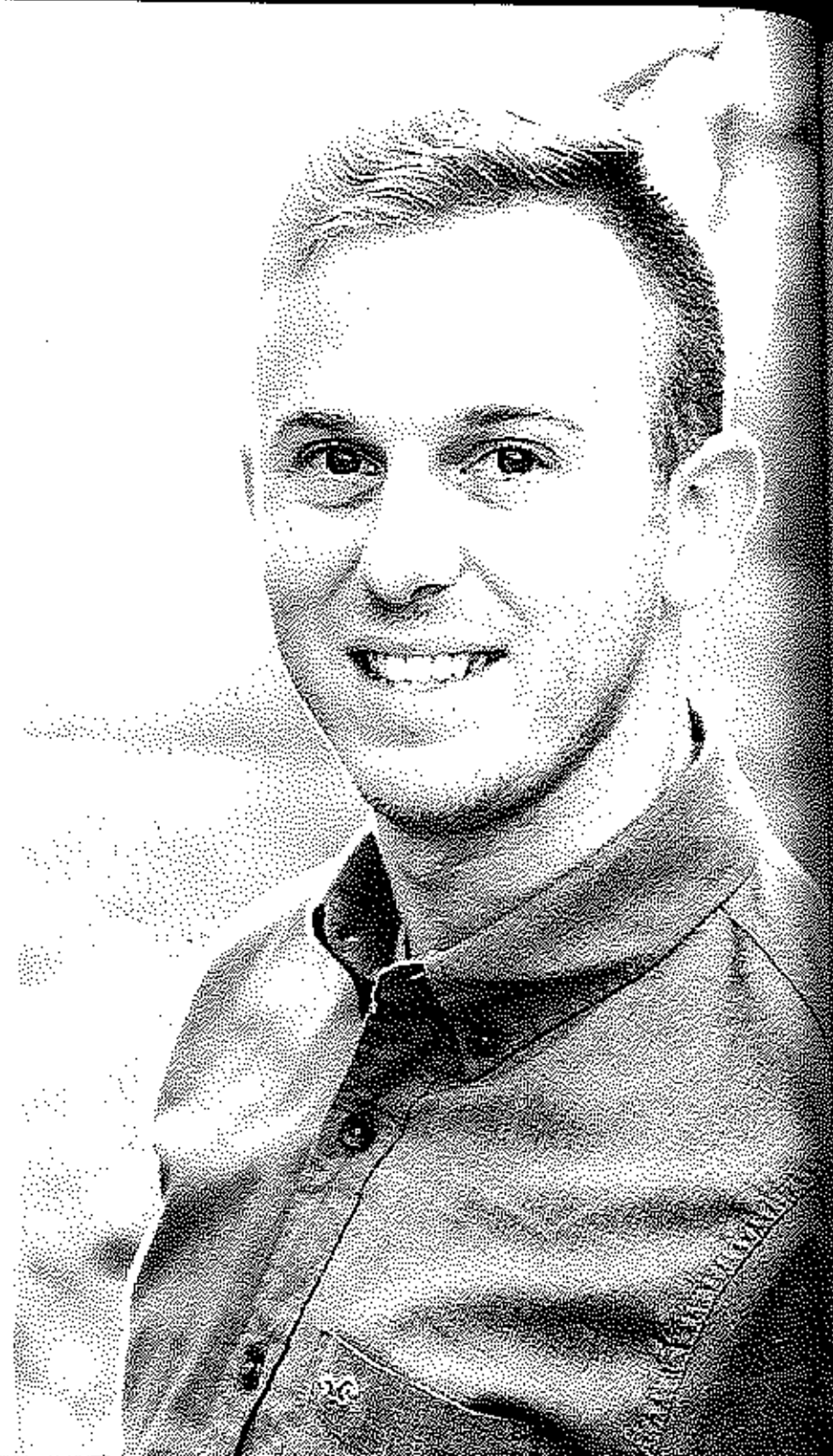
DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES  
desertstream.org

TODAY





# JOSHUA BUCHANAN



CHANGED

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My life is so much different now, and I have no regrets.

JOSHUA BUCHANAN

I am from North Carolina and had a great family as a young child, but I grew up being bullied by neighborhood kids and classmates. I was so frequently called names like “gay” and “fag” that I began to believe that must really be who I was. When I was ten, my parents divorced, after which I experienced even deeper hurt as a result of our broken home.

Throughout my middle and high school years, I experimented with drugs and partying and became really confused about my sexuality. In high school, I started becoming more comfortable with identifying as gay. After graduation I was fully in that lifestyle, with continued drug use and promiscuity. As a result, I was kicked out of my father’s house, which led to what I perceived as rejection.

In 2009, I hit my lowest point in life—finding out that I was HIV positive. My life crumbled, and I thought that it was over. Hopeless, I turned to Jesus and began going to church. Most

**I am healthier  
and more  
fulfilled than  
ever before.**

importantly, I read the Bible and was able to open up with church friends that believed in me and loved me. This new family nurtured me, and I experienced emotional healing. Because of my faith in God and this community of believers, I am healthier and more fulfilled than ever before.

My life today is so much different. I no longer identify as gay, and none of the drug and alcohol use is part of my life. I completed my Master’s degree in Theology at Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA, and travel all over the world for missions work. My life is so much different now, and I have no regrets.

66

I couldn't imagine fighting the same-sex desires my whole life or bearing the weight of loneliness and self-hatred. Counseling saved my life because it gave me hope and encouragement.

### KEN WILLIAMS

From the time I was a young boy, I didn't fit in with the boys, and I also didn't really fit in with the girls. I was the sitewheel kid in every class and had great difficulty in keeping up with the boys. My effeminate mannerisms invited my peers to call me things like "faggot," "homo," or "shrimp." So I feared my walks to and from school and the social interactions afforded by recess and lunch break.

By the time I was in middle school, I felt like no one really knew me. I realized I was experiencing same-sex attraction, and I hated myself because I didn't want to have those desires. I wanted to fit in with the boys, not be sexually attracted to them.

I was starving for masculinity, because I wasn't around much of it. In my early teens, that need for masculinity became sexualized. I became heavily addicted to pornography and masturbation. From first grade until after college, I experienced codependency, living every moment fixated on another male in an effort to feel like I was worth anything. The problem was, no matter how much time I spent with a guy, it never satisfied me.

When I was 17, I felt so hopeless that I wanted to kill myself. I just couldn't imagine fighting the same-sex desires my whole life or bearing the weight of the loneliness and self-hatred I felt.

I finally told my parents about the depths of my pain, and on my own initiative, I started Christian counseling. That counseling saved my life because it gave me hope and encouragement. My counselor connected me with a support group of people who were also leaving homosexuality. I joined that program and realized for the first time that I wasn't alone. They also pointed me to books, which I devoured, containing examples of people whose sexual orientations had changed. The books also helped me recognize underlying issues contributing to my gender confusion.

I then attended a ministry school, and my addictions to pornography, masturbation, and codependency dramatically lessened. There, I found a community of people who were interested to hear about my pain and imperfections, yet still loved me unconditionally.

In time, I was not sexually attracted to men anymore. I started to notice a girl in my church and found myself being aroused by the sight and thought of her. She and I have now been married for 13 years, and we have a great sex life. We have four children together.

Today, I have peace. I'm blessed with plenty of friends, and I feel known and valued by my community. I laugh and enjoy life with my wife and four kids. None of that was true before.

## KEN WILLIAMS



EQUIPPED TO LOVE  
[equippedtolove.com](http://equippedtolove.com)  
[changedmovement.com](http://changedmovement.com)



# AMANDA SMITH



DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES / [desertstream.org](http://desertstream.org)

CHANGE

“

It's not about religion telling me what to do; it's something that's coming from the inside out.

AMANDA SMITH

I used to be a serial dater. I identified as a lesbian, and I had one relationship after another. Plus, I had problems with addictions to drugs and alcohol, and I was violent and angry.

When I came to faith in Christ, I no longer wanted to feel same-sex attraction. Of course, many people said I shouldn't have those attractions because of what the Bible says about homosexuality, and I agreed with them. I didn't feel like I should have those attractions to other women, either. I certainly didn't want them.

So I found myself isolating from Christian women, and it caused me a lot of depression and anxiety. I didn't feel free in my relationships, and I was falling into an emotionally dependent relationship with any female I got close to. It went beyond sexual attraction; the pull I felt towards women had a lot to do with my desire for closeness emotionally.

When feelings of isolation and depression became severe, I reached out to a lady who worked at a ministry and had left a lesbian lifestyle herself. She walked with me through my process for a couple of years and her story gave me hope.

Later, I found another ministry that helps people deal with attractions that they don't want. I went through three of their paid programs, and they were extremely helpful for me. They equipped me with a handful of books with stories

of people with same-sex attractions and how they dealt with them. Those stories touched me because they showed me I wasn't alone and gave me practical ideas for how to handle my attractions.

Counseling was also really important for me because it helped me with the hustle in my mind. I had a lot of unhealthy thought patterns about who I am specifically as a woman. I was constantly comparing myself and creating paralyzing insecurities. Therapy helped me learn how to get rid of those thoughts.

Today, I'm a single woman. I don't want to be single, and I hope one day that a guy will come along. And I don't have to be concerned about being around women. In the past I couldn't see the good in another woman without latching on to her or diminishing who I was as a woman. But now, I have deeper relationships with women and am secure in myself.

I used to dress like a man and talk like a man. And it's funny because now I actually desire to be feminine in ways that I never had before, and I love it. My heart's coming alive in a new way. It's not about a religion telling me what to do, it's something that's coming from the inside out. I feel like God is changing me on the inside, and it's being shown on the outside.

**My heart's  
coming  
alive in a  
new way.**

43

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I realized I was never going to get the identity or affirmation from any of the men I was with. I never felt more alone.

DEAN GREER

I was very insecure as a boy. When I was eight, I was introduced to child sex play by a male friend. My emotional longings became sexualized, and I began longing for more sexual encounters. I wasn't very athletic and was ostracized in school, called names like gay and fag. I decided that it must be true because after all, I was sexually attracted to other males.

I knew my family and community wouldn't condone a homosexual identity, so I hid it and moved away to join the Navy. Surprisingly, what had been a source of shame was celebrated. I was popular and no longer the ostracized man. I went from one homosexual relationship to another.

After about two years, I was diagnosed with HIV on a ship-wide screening. It was 1989, and I was 21. I was told I had 10 more years left. It forced me to reexamine my life, and I realized I was never going to get the identity or affirmation from any of the men I was with. All they wanted was the sex. I never felt more alone in the world.

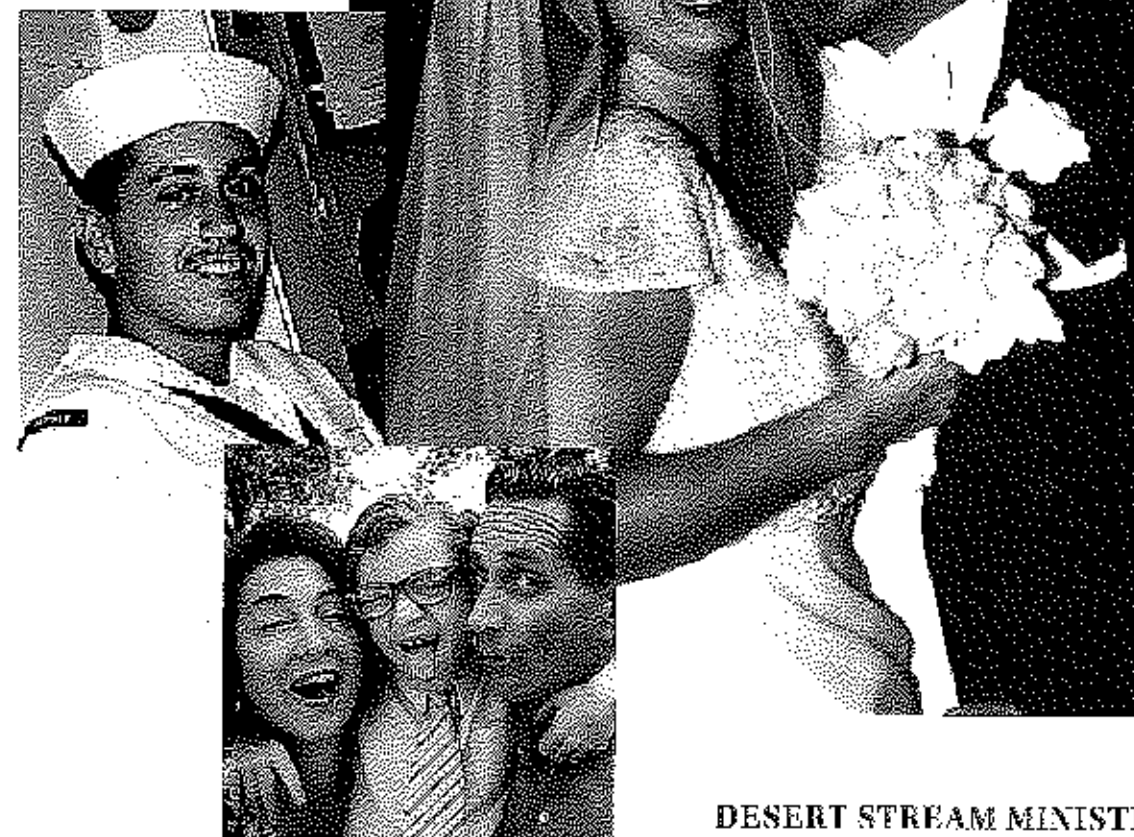
**I'm so grateful I didn't settle for less than what I hoped was possible.**

I went home and told my family I was gay and HIV positive. I anticipated rejection, but they were very loving. I met with a family friend who had also experienced same-sex attraction. He was now married with three kids and no longer living homosexually. I believed that I was born the way I was. But I resolved to give God an opportunity to show me a different way forward.

I went to a therapist who helped me understand how my childhood had distorted the development of my identity as a man. I joined faith-based support groups and programs that gave me tools for living an empowered life. Reading books also gave me practical ways to walk out my new identity. Several of them gave me strength and clarity.

With my homosexual past and HIV, I never thought a woman would want me or that I'd ever have children. I've been married now for 22 years to my beautiful wife Crystal. And my son Jeremiah turned 11 this year. I'm so grateful I didn't settle for less than what I hoped was possible.

## DEAN GREER



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# AMY CRAPSON



CHANGED

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[Trauma therapy] helped me realize that the root cause for calling myself a lesbian was deep-seated pain and not an actual desire to date women.

AMY CRAPSON

When I was a child, I was a victim of sexual abuse. I also witnessed the rape of a young girl by a man. As a result, I developed a real fear and hatred towards men. I was severely depressed and tried to find significance, worth and healing in the arms of women. Unfortunately, every relationship that I was in was very physically and emotionally abusive, and it spiraled me into deeper depression.

I realized that I needed to make a change and that dating women wasn't the answer to the trauma I had experienced. When I became suicidal, I finally reached out for help—first through trauma therapy and then through faith-based emotional healing organizations. I also found help through books on childhood sexual abuse. All this helped me realize that the root cause for calling myself a lesbian was deep-seated pain and not an actual desire to date women. I'm not bitter or suicidal anymore.

Today I'm in healthy relationships with both men and women, and I am discovering who I am as a woman. I have a heart to help others who question their sexuality to better understand the roots of their trauma. The most important thing in my journey is that I learned to forgive myself and my abusers. I am healthier than I have ever been.

“

I'm indebted to the programs and counselors that helped me get my life back.

CECIL JACKMAN

I was raised in church. Growing up, I bonded with girls more than boys. My grandma was also my biggest love. I didn't bond with my dad. He was a workaholic and abusive both verbally and physically.

I was sexually abused from a young age, raped at age four by my babysitter in the bathtub. I felt that if I had been a girl, she wouldn't have done that to me. At school, my third grade teacher's aide told the entire class I was a homosexual and explained in detail what that meant. My nickname became "Cecil the Homo" through the eighth grade. In eighth grade, I was fondled by my male teacher. Not being good at sports involving a ball, I was constantly made fun of in gym class, which further ostracized me from boys my age.

In college, I became a frequent at the adult bookstore. I became addicted to hardcore gay porn and masturbation, though I had no relations until I was 26.

I decided I would be a good, celibate, gay Christian man. I decided to work as hard as I could for God so He'd free me. But change never happened. So after a couple of years of serving in every ministry I could find, I became convinced God hated me.

At 26, I ran into a gay cousin I hadn't seen in years. The next night, we went to a gay bar. I felt free. I was with guys like

me. But while I sat there having a beer, I felt like God said, "What are you doing here?" So I stood up, told my cousin I had to go home, and left. The next week, I felt that same conviction to leave, but this time I drank my beer, partied and had sex with another man.

I had only technically come out for two months, but I hit bottom fast. One night when I was driving home from a night of gay clubbing, I realized I wasn't feeling the sense of conviction to God anymore. It left me feeling alone and empty. I was desperate and put myself into a rehab program in New York. The pastor there said he could help me.

It wasn't an easy process, and I wanted to quit at times. But I was at my end and determined to press forward. I met with a counselor every day. We worked through different things like forgiveness. It was difficult, but I eventually felt much freer. I also roomed with two heterosexual men and bonded with men in a healthy way for the first time in my life.

The change wasn't overnight, but it was continual. Seven years later, I married a woman named Christine. I'm indebted to the programs and counselors that helped me get my life back. After the trauma and despair, I never imagined I could feel this much hope about the future.

**I never  
imagined  
I could  
feel this  
much hope.**

CHANGED

# CECIL JACKMAN

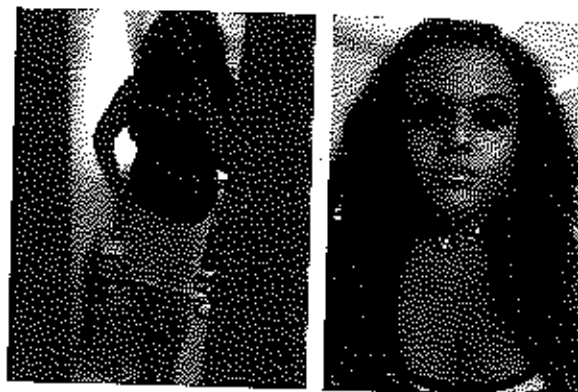


ANCHORED FOR LIFE  
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# JEFFREY MCCALL

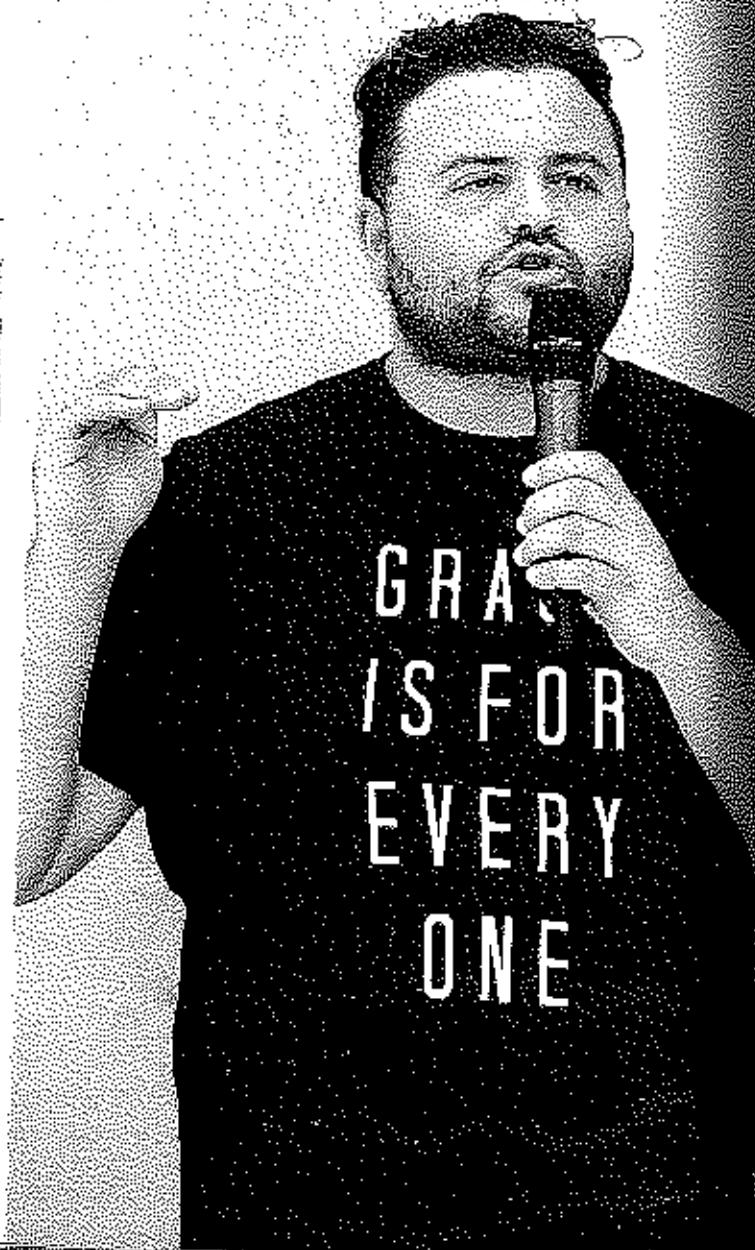
JEFFREY AS "SCARLET"



50

FOR SUCH A TIME, INC.  
[Asuchatime.org](http://Asuchatime.org)

TODAY



CHANGED

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I realized I am fine just the way I was created—as Jeffrey. I don't have to try to become something I wasn't born to be.

JEFFREY MCCALL

When I was 12 years old, I started having homosexual thoughts. I didn't know where they came from or what was going on.

When I was 15, I had my first sexual encounter with a male, and by the age of 18, I was living in an LGBTQ community in Nashville, Tennessee. I dated many different men and started experimenting with hard drugs. I had a job at a club, and I put my identity in being a homosexual male.

My lifestyle became so destructive that I decided to move to Georgia and go back to school. I thought if I left the drugs and partying, people wouldn't see the turmoil going on inside me. It worked, and I did so well in school that everyone on the outside thought I was fine. But inside, I was destitute.

During my last semester as an undergraduate, I met a professor who had been through a lot of the same things that I had been through growing up. But unlike me, she was happy! She was full of life, peace, and joy. She talked to me about Jesus and the way that He changed her life.

I started to live a transgender life as a woman, believing it would give me a new view on the world. I even did an interview with ABC News to push trans rights in my city. I thought I was going to find happiness.

But I wasn't happy, and I started drinking heavily. I became very promiscuous, dating a different man every day. I began

to think about killing myself. Authorities at my school found out, and I had to spend four days in mental health facilities. My professors and doctors treated me as Scarlet, the woman I was trying to be.

Eventually, I was diagnosed by a psychiatrist with gender dysphoria, which allowed me to begin pursuing several reassignment surgeries. I thought my life was progressing and that once I had the surgeries I would finally be happy.

But my life got progressively worse. I had quit drugs and tried changing things on the outside, but I was still destitute inside. Finally, I decided I wanted to change inwardly and live in relationship with Jesus, whom I had heard about all my life but never known personally. I took all my stuff from my life as Scarlet and threw it in a dumpster. I made a video to post publicly about cutting ties with my past.

From that time, I began to break through the unhappiness and lack of purpose that I had always felt. My life has changed so much since leaving behind my fake identity as Scarlet. I now have peace and joy and much more satisfaction in my new lifestyle than I did in the one I was living before. All the suicidal thoughts that came from not knowing my identity have left. I realized I am fine just the way I was created—as Jeffrey. I don't have to try to become something I wasn't born to be. I feel so comfortable in my own skin.

**I feel so comfortable in my own skin.**

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Six years after leaving the gay lifestyle, I met my wife, Amanda. I love being a husband and "Daddy" to our three children.

JIM DOMEN

I never imagined that I would enter the homosexual lifestyle after being raised in a God-fearing home and accepting Christ at age seven. However, after I graduated from college, I was so desperate to love and be loved that I didn't care that my partner was HIV and hepatitis C positive.

Nonetheless, when I lost all my worldly possessions on June 8, 2002, God changed my life forever. I heard God's voice telling me to come back to Him. I told God, "I'm yours again," and I began to realize that His strength is made perfect in my weakness. The next morning, I found \$5.00 on the sidewalk. The second I picked it up, I heard God say, "I took care of the Israelites in the desert; I'll take care of you in yours."

This was the first of many miracles that began my journey of transformation. I pursued years of professional therapy, as well as programs through Desert Stream Ministries (Cross Current and Living Waters). These tools were instrumental when it came to understanding same-sex attraction and walking in freedom from homosexuality. Although the counseling and programs never

**I am no longer desperate to love and be loved.**

promised I would be freed from temptation, they provided tools to pursue a way of life using God's design for sexuality.

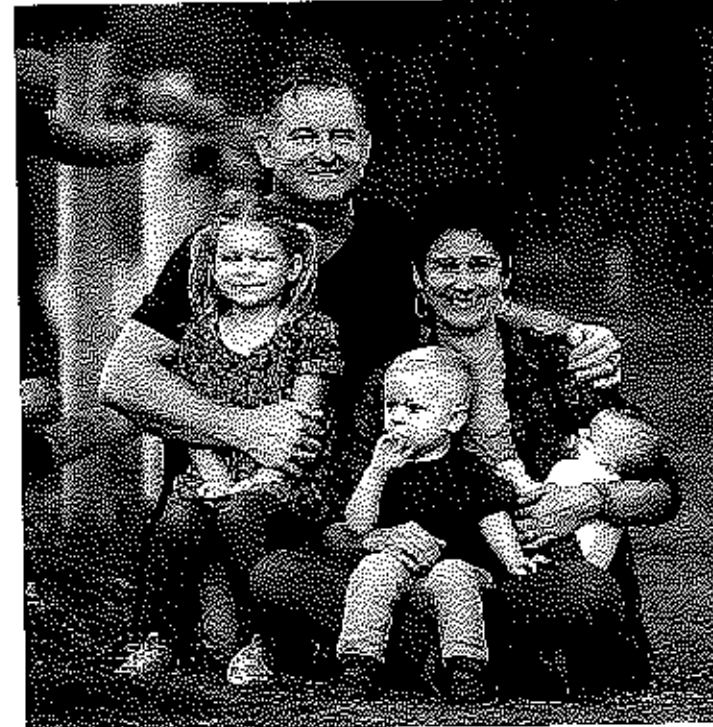
Then in 2005, I began dating! I remember thinking, "Wow, God, the plumbing you designed for the opposite sex is working!" Although I dated many women, I never thought I'd find a wife because I was 34 years old and "the good ones were already taken." That's when I gave up my quest and told God I would focus on His kingdom. Yet God had something better planned for me...

Six years after leaving the gay lifestyle, I met my wife, Amanda, "God's gift from heaven." We were married in 2009, and five years later God blessed us with our daughter, Alliah, whose name in Hebrew means "ascending to God." In September 2016, Amanda gave birth to our son, Ryker, whose name means "strong leader." In 2018, our third child, Asher Elizabeth, was born — and I couldn't be more blessed.

I love being a husband and "Daddy" to our three children and am no longer desperate to love and be loved.

# JIM DOMEN

CHURCH UNITED  
churchunited.com





# DAREN MEHL

VOICE OF THE VOICELESS  
voiceofthevoiceless.info



God healed my mind and my heart, and then my behavior and sexual attractions changed.

DAREN MEHL

In my early twenties, I attempted to live as a celibate gay, but that all changed the night I was raped at a party. The trauma threw me into a spiral of same-sex encounters. To avoid HIV, I moved in with my boyfriend and settled into a monogamous relationship. For nearly a decade, although I looked happy on the outside, I lived in constant inner turmoil and stress because I knew my homosexual behavior wasn't who I was. I did my best to ignore my inner voice, but doing so came at a high cost to my personal peace and conscience.

All that began to change the night I was invited to a prayer service and told a friend about my inner battle. Deep down I knew I hadn't been created gay but couldn't reconcile why I had same-sex attraction. My friend prayed for me, and for the first time in my life, I saw clearly that my issue was sexual addiction, not sexual orientation. That night, my hope was restored in my long-lost dream to marry a woman and have a family. Right then and there, I asked God to end my same-sex relationship because I knew I couldn't do it myself, and I asked Him to arrange it so I could marry a particular woman. When I got home that night, my boyfriend abruptly ended our relationship, and soon I was dating and eventually married the exact woman I had prayed for.

While this set me on a course towards personal peace and

fulfillment, even as a happily married man, I could not break my secret addiction to gay porn. Despite my best efforts, I cheated on my wife with another man. In an instant, instead of feeling fulfilled and satisfied, I felt dead. I thought I'd lost it all—my wife, my unborn son, my best friends—but by a miracle of mercy and love, my wife took me back.

**I now see other men as potential friends, not sexual partners.**

Desperate for help to get free from gay porn, I pursued spiritual counseling. Over the next year, through the help of many powerful books and resources, weekly prayer and support from a faithful friend, and my wife's unconditional love, I found my true identity. For the first time in my life, I began to see the false beliefs I had about myself, men, women and my sexuality, and my sexual orientation changed. God healed my mind and my heart, and then my behavior and sexual attractions changed. I now see other men as potential friends, not sexual partners.

The journey wasn't easy, but it was worth it. Today I am a whole person living authentically to who I am. My sexuality and behaviors are in line with my original design. For the last 12 years, I've been married to my beautiful wife, my gay porn addiction is gone, and now my sexual energy is directed toward her. I'm the happy, fulfilled father of a beautiful four-year-old son and three-year-old daughter.

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Seminars helped put words and understanding to what I was experiencing. I no longer experience same-sex desires and have walked over 20 years in my choice.

GWEN GIBSON

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Most of my life, including my childhood, I knew my attractions to women were not like those of my peers. I can't remember a time in my early life that wasn't filled with that thought. It wasn't until much later, after college, that I began to seriously consider coming out to friends and family. I confronted my own feelings and ventured into a same-sex relationship. I thought I'd be fulfilled, happy or at least relieved but felt little more than momentary satisfaction. The emotional struggles, heavy drinking, depression and other relational disconnects in my life remained. Honestly, I was surprised. I thought a gay life was supposed to be my answer.

I had grown up in a Christian home and in the church. While I stopped going to church after college, I never lost the sense of loving God. It was the one relationship that felt more

### I'm living an abundant life.

real to me than any other. I began an honest pursuit of God. It led me to books from others who had similar stories to mine, seminars that helped put words and understanding to what I was experiencing, and supportive prayer and spiritual counseling that helped me along the way. I was grateful for Christian pastors who were accepting and gracious for both my straight and lesbian friends, who were genuinely supportive of my choice to live as a homosexually-oriented woman.

The change was steady, but not instant. I now no longer experience same-sex desires and have walked over 20 years in my choice. Much of my life has changed, including my emotional wellbeing and the lack of same sex attraction. I'm living an abundant life as a single woman and have never considered living as I did before. I've been really happy with the choice I've made, even on the difficult days.

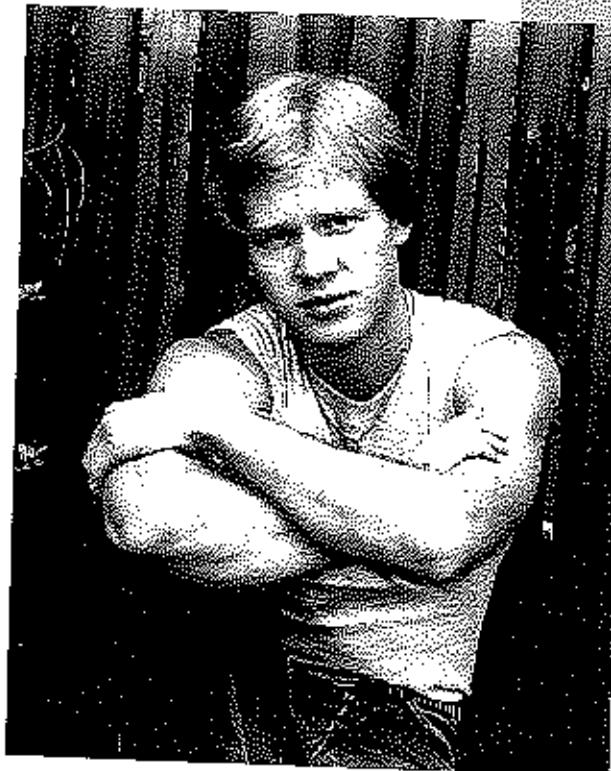
# GWEN GIBSON



57



# DAVID KYLE FOSTER



PURE PASSION MEDIA,  
MASTER OF LIFE MINISTRIES  
[purepassion.us](http://purepassion.us)

CHANGSHU

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The things that turned me on in men symbolized what I believed were absent in me.

DAVID KYLE FOSTER

**B**efore I pursued change in my sexuality, I was deeply involved in the gay lifestyle while working as an actor in Hollywood. It was a lonely existence because the gay community was obsessed with youth and beauty. The shallowness of it all was very disheartening. Relationships lasted a very short time. Love was more sex and romance than commitment.

As a young man, I was hit on by older men daily, sometimes violently. The corruption of youth and the blind eye that everyone else turned was deeply troubling to me. Like so many homosexuals, I went through hundreds of partners trying to find someone who was capable of actually loving me, and it just wasn't there. We were all trying to fill a deep inner need that simply could not be found in gay relationships.

Before it was all over, the emptiness and shallowness of it all had made me suicidal, alcoholic, drug addicted, venereally diseased, and very, very jaded. The so-called committed relationships were highly touted, but in reality were non-existent. In every case I knew of, I discovered both partners regularly cheating on their lovers, sometimes with me. There were no exceptions.

For all these reasons, I finally decided to pursue change. The last straw was the day I went to a gay club and saw all the lonely old men sitting at the bar drunk out of their minds while the younger people, many of whom were underage, laughed and partied like there was no tomorrow. The old men drank themselves into a stupor every night because they were no

longer young and beautiful. And as a result, no one wanted them. The only sex they got was when they paid young teens to go to bed with them.

I decided then and there I was not going to end up like that. At the same time, my substance abuse and sex addiction were out of control because I was using them to cope with the pain that came with my lifestyle. So I gave it all up and begged God to rescue me. I found my salvation through faith-based resources and pursuing a personal relationship with God. I discovered that my homosexual drive stemmed from a need to find a missing father figure.

**I've never been healthier in my life, and I would never go back.**

The things that turned me on in men symbolized what I believed were absent in me. And I was also afraid of sexually mature women, which stemmed from several bad experiences with women during my youth.

After leaving the gay lifestyle and receiving healing for these underlying issues, my fear of women went away. My desire for a father figure was replaced with God being my father. As the brokenness was healed, my addictions simply went away because the pain that drove them was healed. And I finally was able to see myself complete as a man without trying to extract masculinity from other men.

As a result, my unhealthy coping mechanisms went away. The alcohol, the drugs, the sexual addiction and the suicidal thoughts all vanished. I've never been healthier in my life, and I would never go back to such a destructive life. In short, I was rescued from an early death and a very lonely, horrible life.

This ministry was my place of healing. They loved me every step of the way. This kind of love offered me hope, not just something to numb my pain.

## CARMEN VAUGHT

Life before I pursued change felt out of control. It was a constant battle to find peace in who I was and to prove I was good.

When I started to have feelings for other girls, confusion entered in. I had no safe place to talk about it, and I believed the shame I carried would only grow if I admitted how I was feeling.

Because I was not like other girls and felt rejected by guys I liked, I felt unworthy in my femininity.

In my early 20s I began meeting people in the gay community, and I felt like I finally fit in. This community championed me to come out.

As I ran into the arms of this so-called love, my shame and self hatred actually grew, and I felt that people in the Church and my family also hated me. I thought that, if my family would just accept my sexuality, then I would be at peace and life would be amazing.

After twelve years of family heartache and separation, they started to express their love and admiration for me and to express their desire for relationship. I knew they didn't agree with my lifestyle, yet I felt their love for me. I thought I'd be ecstatic about that, but I actually found myself thinking, *maybe I don't accept this life for myself.*

Six months later, my girlfriend of three years was cheating on me and moved out. I was miserable. The life I had pursued to find fulfillment left me at rock bottom instead. I was so

scared to walk away from that identity because I didn't know who I was without it.

I finally told God, "I have no idea who I am, but You created me so You're going to have to tell me."

I decided to go back to church. On my first visit, I noticed an announcement for "a Christ-centered healing and support group for those seeking truth and grace in their sexuality and relationship with God." I attended the first meeting and when it was my turn to share why I was there, all I could say through my tears was "self worth."

This ministry was my place of healing. For the first time in my life, I felt like I could share my pain with others. We met for several months, uncovering the wounded places, and they loved me every step of the way, even in my mess. This kind of love offered me hope, not just something to numb my pain.

As I looked to Jesus, my heart changed, and I began to understand who God created me to be. I accepted a relationship with Him, not a set of rules.

Now the internal battle is over, and I can walk in peace in my true identity. I love who I am and that I'm different than a lot of women.

My life now has so much purpose. I get to use my profession of photography in ministry, travel around the world, and bring hope to others with my story of God's love. His plans are way better than anything I ever imagined!

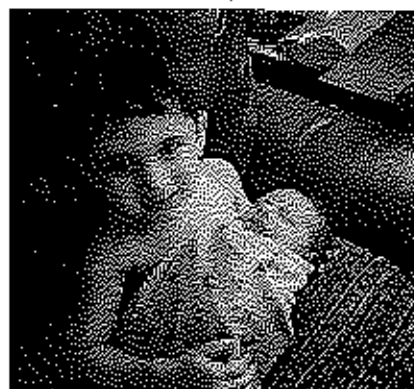
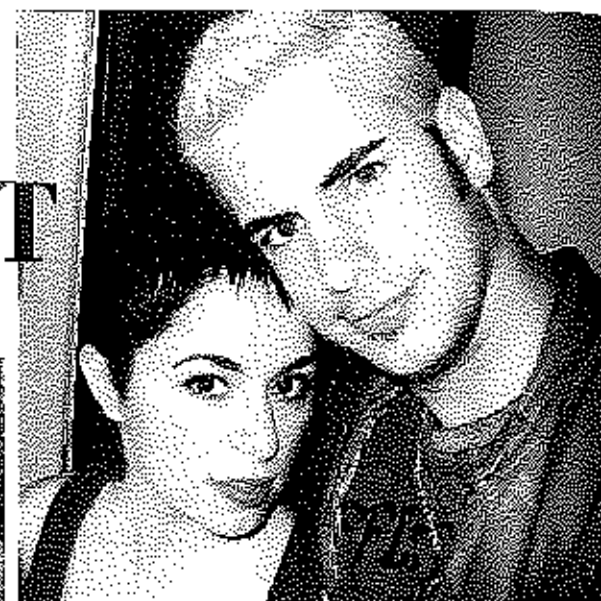
**I love who I am. My life now has so much purpose.**

## CARMEN VAUGHT





# APRIL LOCKHART



62

CHANGED

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I watched personal testimonies on YouTube of many other ex-gays who talked about their journey. If they had found genuine transformation, then I could, too.

APRIL LOCKHART

My former life looked busy and full of fun—lots of sex, alcohol and crazy partying. But I was just trying to distract myself from my own misery. I longed for stability and a relationship that would last. I felt like I was on an emotional roller coaster. There were times that felt good, but there were also a lot of lows. I experienced so much anxiety and depression that I began to believe those feelings were a part of me.

I was gay as far back as I can remember. I had no desire for male companionship because the opposite sex was repulsive to me. Just to make sure I was really gay, I dated two guys, and honestly, men were of no interest to me. Relationship with them felt forced and awkward.

Even when I found the girl of my dreams, who was perfect in every way, I was so unhappy in that relationship. There was always something missing, but I could never figure out what it was. No matter what I did or had, I couldn't fill this longing. I was never happy or satisfied, and my depression and anxiety escalated to serious panic attacks.

I began planning my own suicide. I didn't want to break my mother's heart, so I planned it to look like an accident. I tried twice but failed both times.

Fast forward to today. My life is the polar opposite of what

it was before. I'm 100% free of the emotional roller coaster and have no desire to engage in same-sex relations. I married an absolutely incredible man and have two boys. They are my constant reminders of how good God is to me and how he pulled me out. I don't suffer from depression or anxiety and I'm not on a constant search to fulfill an inner need. My once heavy heart now feels light. Some days I cry tears of joy because I still don't understand how someone like me could have all this.

**It was  
the best  
choice  
I ever  
made.**

Everything began to change for me when I decided I didn't want to be homosexual anymore, although it was a process. I read books that encouraged me and joined a small group Bible study that let me be open, share my struggles, and have access to encouragement. I read my Bible constantly and implemented its principles in my life. I personally did not know of any other gay people like me that I could partner with, so I watched personal testimonies on YouTube of many other ex-gays who were coming out to talk about their journey. I found it extremely helpful to see how others had experienced change in their sexual desires. It was like a candle of hope held up for me when I grew weak. If they had found genuine transformation, then I could, too. I did. And it was the best choice I ever made.

63

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Today, I am wholly content in a female body with no desire to be a man. I am completely free from the desire for a sex change.

LINDA SEILER

I was transgender and exclusively attracted to women until my 30s. I have no memories of being content in a female body. By the age of nine, I'd made plans to change my name to David and get a sex change operation, but I never went through with it.

In the midst of that, I found a compassionate community of people, met Jesus, and, through an 11-year journey of transformation, Jesus set me free.

The change I experienced wasn't from a single event, but, rather, a gradual process that resulted from the following:

A woman I knew stepped in to be my mother, invested in me and welcomed me into the world of women. A pastor of mine never stopped reaching out to me, despite how tough things were for me at times. Women surrounded me and affirmed me as a woman among them. Several male friends affirmed me as a female and treated me as distinct from, yet cherished by, men.

After all this, I was asexual for a period of time—not attracted to women, but not yet attracted to men. I didn't care because I was so happy to be free from the pain I'd experienced

my whole life.

As I continued to pursue healing for my heart, attractions to men began to surface—which was thrilling, yet awkward, for me because I was in my mid-thirties! As I continued to experience transformation, a greater desire for the opposite sex was awakened. Since then, my attractions to men have steadily increased. I've discovered what "my type" is and hope to marry someday.

**I love my femininity and thoroughly enjoy being a woman.**

Today, I am wholly content in a female body with no desire to be a man. I love my femininity and thoroughly enjoy being a woman. I am completely free from the desire for a sex change, the sexual fetish for urinals, and all sexual addictions. I see now that all of those desires were attempts to console my broken heart. My sexual brokenness was simply a mirror reflecting the deep wounds in my soul that needed healing.

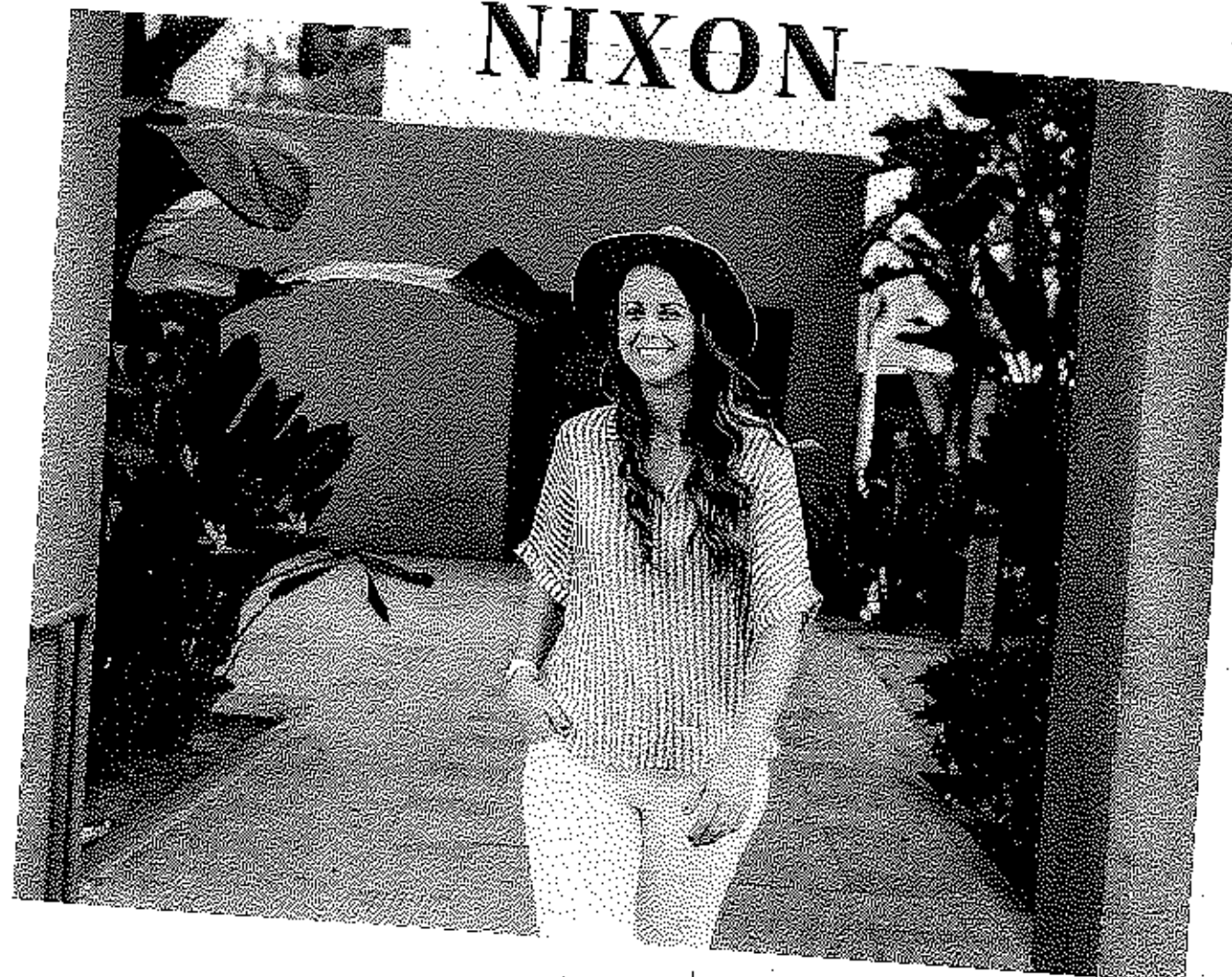
Each day as I live with more freedom, I grow more and more sexual in my femininity. I'm a sporty gal and will probably never be extremely girly, but I'm comfortable with who I am and content as a female in a female body.

# LINDA SEILER

LINDA SEILER  
lindaseiler.com



# MJ NIXON



UPROOTED HEART, INC.  
uprootedheart.com

CHANGED

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Community and accountability were key in my journey. I began to understand the truth of who I truly am.

MJ NIXON

Being born into a conservative Christian family, I was taught right from wrong at a young age, but I could never reconcile my faith with the attractions that lingered within. Being the middle child with two brothers, I started taking on their attributes and mentalities. This shaped my mindset from a healthy understanding of femininity to embracing a more masculine identity. Outwardly, I was a rough and tumble tomboy, but inwardly, attractions towards females began to grow. Not knowing who to talk to or how to even share, I hid my attractions for my whole childhood and adolescence.

In college, everything changed. I was away from home and was finally in an environment of acceptance. One day, a woman caught my eye; a friendship was formed, and a sexual relationship followed. Through this new relationship, I expressed my hidden inward attractions toward females for the first time in my life. We lived together for five years

and envisioned a future together. Despite the deep bond this created, there was still a pull to end that relationship and seek after one with God. I really had always had an inner tug of war going on that caused me to question my attraction to her and my relationship with Jesus. Ultimately, I understood this inner conflict was directing me to the truth of my life as a woman.

The Bible was the greatest resource in my journey of freedom from homosexuality, along with videos of former LGBTQ members on YouTube and Vimeo. I attended a small group for people seeking healing from sexual

brokenness, which was a huge support for me. Community and accountability were key in my journey. I began to understand the truth of who I truly am. Now I live to serve others, share my story and tell others about the transformation I have experienced. And I have seen God lead others into happy and free lives, healing their hearts the way He did mine.

**Now I live to share  
my story and tell  
others about the  
transformation I  
have experienced.**



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I found resources online that were really encouraging to me in my process. Today, I have a greater sense of wholeness and inner stability than I've ever felt before.

LAUREN HART

When I was living a lesbian lifestyle, I had a lot of inner conflict that I didn't know what to do with. I thought things like, *I can't fully give my life to this*. However, I couldn't remember feeling as loved or accepted until I met my girlfriend. I had a lot of differing outside opinions. Some people said living as a lesbian suited me, while other people said it didn't make sense for me. And in many ways it seemed to fit—I did not have nearly as many emotional struggles or insecurities being with women as I had with men.

As a Christian, I wrestled a lot with what my faith meant for my lifestyle. I was experiencing a form of love and comfort, but I still felt like I was compromising on something I could have that would be much greater. I would have considered myself a Q in the LGBTQ. From experiencing severe verbal and physical bullying from young boys, along with sexual assault from a man in my teens, feeling comfortable around men was a challenge.

I had a mentor I would go to, to sort out what I was feeling. I remember sitting with her one day, talking about my inner conflict. She said to me, "I'm going to love you no matter what you pick." In that moment, I felt this space of love to truly search this out instead of feeling backed into a corner either way.

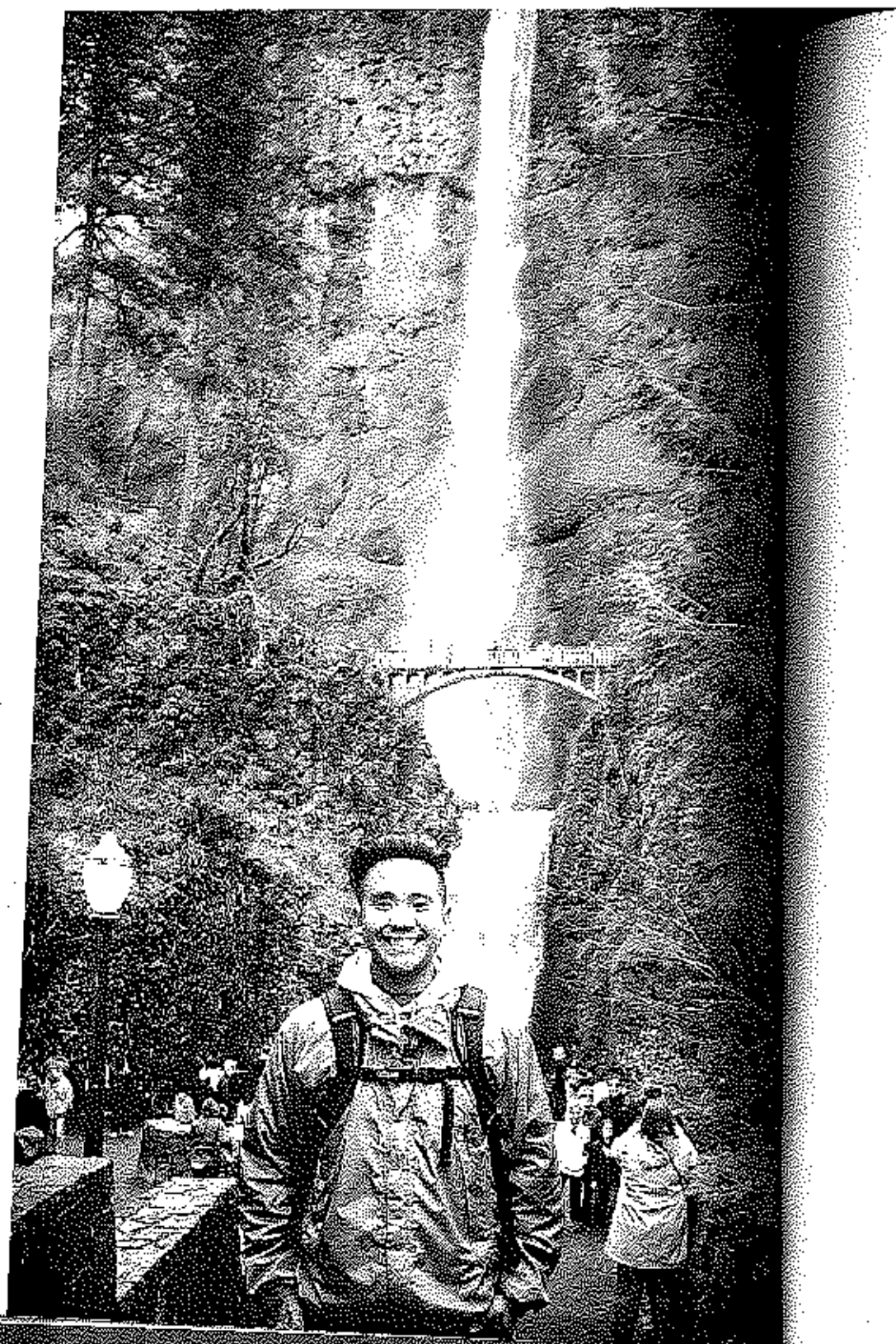
I also found resources online that were really encouraging to me in my process. I searched for any story of anyone who had ever come out of homosexuality. I even heard about a heterosexual couple who had both been gay before they got married. I remember being shocked. I finally felt hope. I wanted to know that it was possible, that I didn't have to choose a lesbian lifestyle, and that it didn't have to define me.

Today, I have a greater sense of wholeness and inner stability than I've ever felt before. The type of love that I get to receive now is a wholesome love that just keeps giving. It doesn't give so it can take. It gives because it doesn't run out.

# LAUREN HART



# ANDREW MEDINA



CHANGED

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I found a ministry focused on getting to know the heart of who you are, rather than focusing on the behaviors you're doing.

ANDREW MEDINA

Growing up, I wasn't a typical boy who liked sports. I was sensitive and enjoyed playing with dolls and dancing. People were always telling me that I wasn't manly enough, and I was mocked about it from grade school through high school. I was also sexually assaulted when I was young, and I was bullied frequently. Then in high school, when I became more aware of sexual orientation and heard people saying that this is what it means to be gay, I decided, 'Okay, I failed at being straight. Maybe I could try living this lifestyle.'

So, I began identifying as gay, and I found a lot of confidence in being accepted by the gay community. I started drinking, doing drugs, and being promiscuous at an early age. Then I started to drink more and do more drugs until I was having a lot of blackout nights and not remembering on the next day what I had done the night before. I was having multiple sex partners without using protection, and I was seeking men through outlets that weren't safe.

Then I began having suicidal thoughts. I felt really empty because there was something inside me that thought, 'I'm more than this. But I didn't know how to get out of the lifestyle. Still, I knew if I continued in it, it wasn't going to end well.

I found a ministry focused on getting to know the heart of who you are, rather than focusing on the behaviors you're doing. I learned about my true identity and how to have real relationships. I was honest about my same-sex attractions, and my friends there still accepted me and were a safe place for me to be open about my story. It was scary to be authentic at first, but

they didn't judge me; instead they encouraged me. It was a powerfully healing experience.

I began to process through many emotions and events that I thought I had dealt with, learning to see the truth in them. I realized that many of the labels that had been put on me were just lies. I learned to feel accepted and loved by God. And I was even able to forgive the person who sexually assaulted me.

I've also learned that it's okay to be a sensitive man. I like to love people, hear their stories, and work with children. I didn't get to experience those things before because of all the shame I felt.

I had girlfriends when I was young, but men were saying that I wasn't man enough to have a girlfriend. So I experienced a lot of rejection and shame that influenced my mindset. Now, I'm dreaming about having a wife and kids one day, which are things I never thought would be possible for me.

Now I'm  
dreaming  
about  
having a  
wife and  
kids.



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Today I am happy, joyful, and feminine—all things that I never was while living as a lesbian. I am no longer sexually attracted to women.

ELIZABETH WONING

Throughout most of my life I never belonged. I always felt excluded, and I questioned my sexuality and my gender. I hated the idea of being feminine because it was so foreign. I didn't feel like a girl, but I also didn't identify as a boy.

I made my first meaningful connection with another woman when I was in my mid-teens. We had such deep intimacy and love that our bond set a standard for my other relationships for several years. Though I occasionally dated men, and briefly in my early 20s was married to a man, I never developed fulfilling or lasting relationships with them.

I "came out" when I was in my early twenties after my brief marriage fell apart. I felt lesbianism explained my childhood and young adult experiences. I thought I was finally being authentic and true to myself. As a dyke I felt powerful and asserted myself in stereotypically masculine ways. I adopted men's attire and a crewcut.

During those years I found family and support as a lesbian living within the gay communities of large cities. I decided I wanted to attend seminary, and I did so as one of just a handful of openly gay students. After seminary I began working with youth, but questioned my faith.

In that season I reevaluated what I believed about God, what I believed about the Bible, and what I believed about myself. Through that process I realized it was possible that

some of my ideology had been wrong. I resolved to follow my faith sacrificially, which required re-evaluating what I understood the Christian sexual ethic to be.

Up to that point, I believed I was born gay and that God had created me that way. As I further studied Christian doctrine, eventually I no longer believed I was born a lesbian. My experience of God's love, the Christian community around me, and my desire to pursue a life of prayer had a dramatic influence on my life.

I came to terms with the impact misogyny had on my self-perception and pursued pastoral care and counseling that addressed childhood hurts and perceptions. Above all, I acknowledged I had rejected myself as a woman.

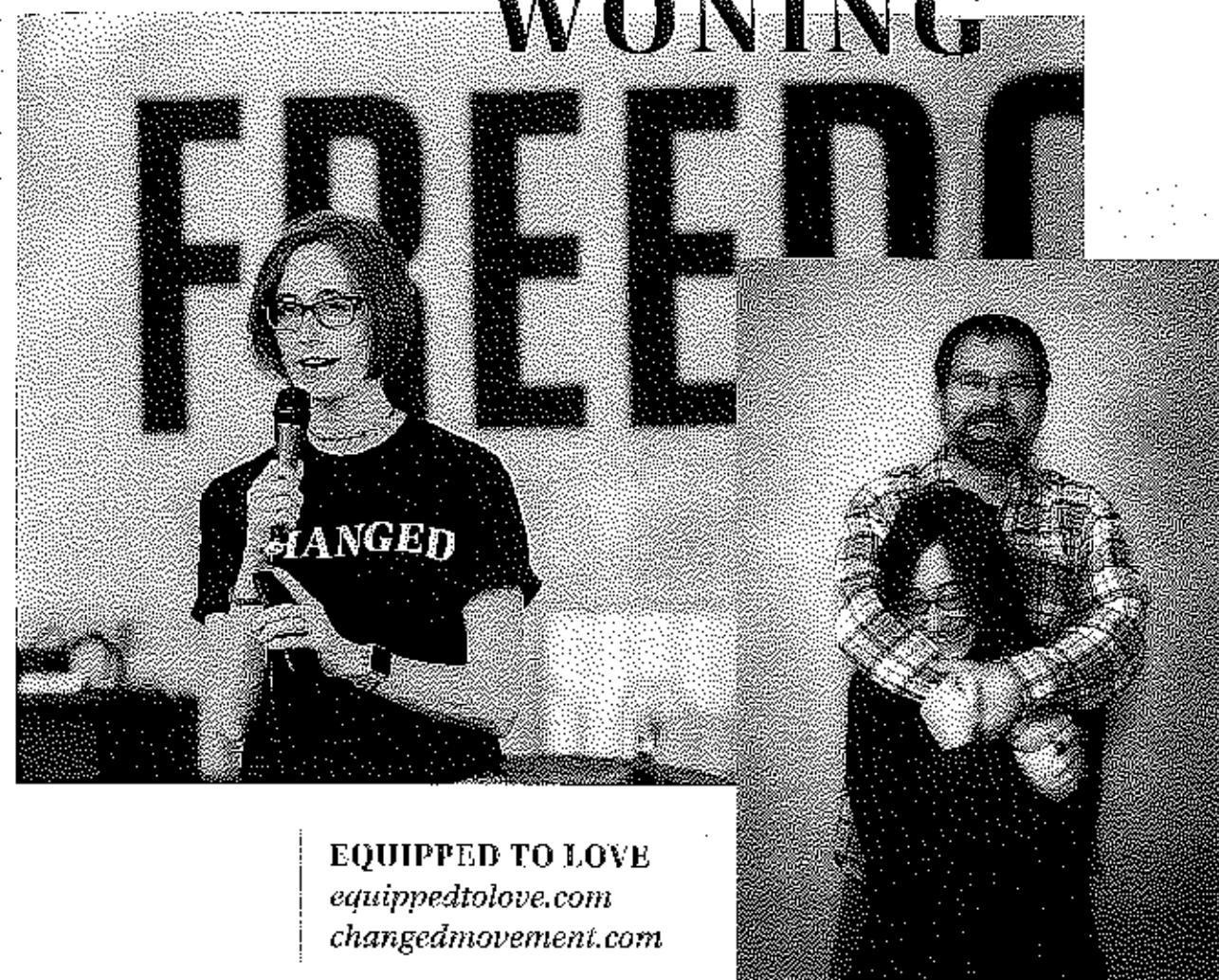
I did not specifically seek change in my sexuality; nevertheless, I began experiencing changes in my sexual desires. I became attracted to a man,

which was one of the most unexpected and humbling experiences of my life, since I had so fully identified as a lesbian. He and I got married and have had a strong marriage of 14 years thus far. Today I am happy, joyful, and feminine—all things that I never was while living as a lesbian. I am no longer sexually attracted to women. Rather, I am a strong advocate for their empowerment to overcome the effects of injustices against them.

**I am a strong advocate for their empowerment to overcome the effects of injustices against them.**

CHANGED

# ELIZABETH WONING



EQUIPPED TO LOVE  
[equippedtolove.com](http://equippedtolove.com)  
[changedmovement.com](http://changedmovement.com)

# STEPHEN BLACK



FIRST STONE MINISTRIES  
[firststone.org](http://firststone.org)

CHANGED

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I began to pursue change through counseling and getting help with emotional healing. A year and a half later, I met my wife. We have now been married for 33 years.

STEPHEN BLACK

I was molested as a six-year-old, and again at age ten. I was bullied a lot and got beat up. By the time I was in junior high, everyone was calling me gay, and I believed it. I was deeply depressed by eighth grade and had an older guy tell me he wanted to “show me the ropes” of the homosexual community.

For the next eight years, I lived in that community and had relationships with a number of very wealthy and powerful men. I was a boy toy.

I did have a couple of significant gay relationships, but by the end of them, I became very disillusioned. Then my little brother died, and his death caused me to reevaluate my life and what I believed. For a year and a half, I wrestled with what I believed, and then I gave my life to Jesus. I told God that if He would change me, I was willing to change.

I began to pursue change through counseling and getting help with emotional healing. A year and a half later, I met my wife. We have now been married for 33 years. We have three children and four grandchildren.

For the first 10 years after I decided I wanted to change, my attraction to men was fading away. These last 15 years, I stopped experiencing same-sex attraction altogether.



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I started seeing a Christian counselor, attended conferences and found some books. These were all very instrumental in bringing about change and healing in my life.

## JEFF JOHNSTON

At five years old, I engaged in sexual play and was introduced to sexual things by other young boys in my neighborhood. That caused me to pull back from connecting with other boys, because I didn't want that to happen again. So, I tended to connect more with girls. In junior high, I discovered pornography and got hooked on it. I felt shame and guilt, afraid that someone would find out what I was doing. I became even more disturbed when my fascination with pornography began to shift from women to men. But I worked to maintain an outer image of being fine for years, even as the sexual addiction and homosexual attraction increased.

Then in my early 20s I went to Australia as a missionary for several years. When I came back, I was working with a high school group and was reaching the end of my rope. The contrast between struggling intensely with my sexuality and being involved in the church was extremely difficult.

But during that time, I went to a conference called "Hope and Healing for the Homosexual." It was the first time I had heard anyone talk about potential reasons behind same sex attraction or that it was possible to leave homosexuality.

That conference was a turning point for me, and within a week, I started going to a support group for people who also wanted to leave homosexuality. I had kept this part of my life hidden for years, but slowly I began talking to friends and family about my struggle. Where I feared rejection, I

usually found compassion and concern. I also started seeing a Christian counselor, attended conferences about healing sexuality and found some books on the issue. These were all very instrumental in bringing about change and healing in my life.

Although I started out strong in my journey out of homosexuality, I went through a period of time where I really questioned my faith and my identity as a Christian. I started going to clubs and having sex with men I had just met. There was a lot of talk about HIV/AIDS during that time, and I know my choices were very unsafe.

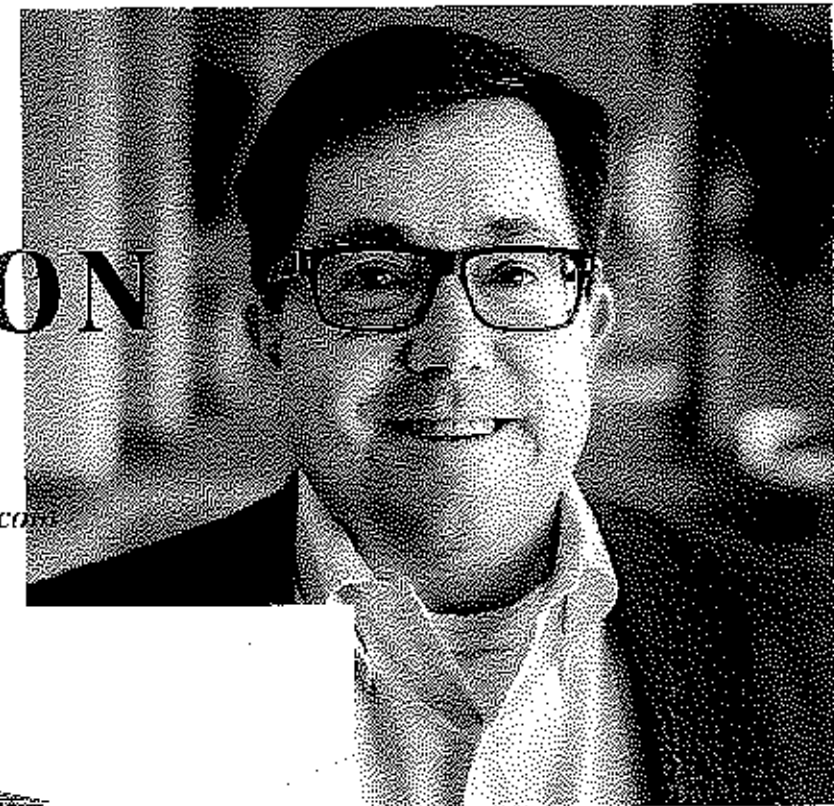
Finally, I made a return to my faith and to the Church. Instead of pursuing a role in leadership, I just focused on pursuing healthy, non sexual relationships with men. I had a mentor, and I got involved in weekly accountability relationship groups. I had gay friends who loved and accepted me where I was but who would also call me out when I did things that weren't good for me. And I realized that my struggle wasn't that different from some of their struggles. Those relationships were incredibly healing and transformative for me.

A few years later, I began leading a group at my church, and a young lady came, who I thought was cute, funny and I ended up dating and then getting married. We are still married and have a healthy relationship and have three sons together. Our oldest is 21, and we have twins who are 10.

JEFF  
JOHNSTON

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY'S  
THE DAILY CITIZEN

[dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com](http://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com)





# KIM ZEMBER

OVERCOME / [OvercomeMin.com](http://OvercomeMin.com)



CHANGED

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In contrast to what most people would think, I actually found great freedom [to stop acting on my same-sex desires].

KIM ZEMBER

I started having homosexual desires in high school and began acting on them when I was 17. For many years, I hid them from my family and friends because I felt so much shame and guilt about them, which came from a deep feeling I had personally that I wasn't meant to live a homosexual lifestyle. I was living a double life, and it tormented me.

I lived that way for years, dating girl after girl and hiding it from everyone I cared about. I ended up marrying a man whom I loved dearly as a husband, but was not in love with. Then I cheated on him with a woman. After that happened, I was basically forced to come out with the life I was choosing to live. The people close to me accepted me and were supportive although I felt in my heart that they believed, as I did deep down, that my lifestyle wasn't good for me. Going from relationship to relationship, I was never at peace in my heart, and I finally hit rock bottom when one of my girlfriends cheated on me.

At that point, I realized that I was in a vicious cycle of relationships that weren't fulfilling for me. Even though everyone around me supported my lifestyle and told me it was OK, I felt deeply convicted that I needed to make big changes if I wanted different results in my life.

I became so desperate that I finally decided to surrender everything about the way I had been living and ask for God's help. From that moment on, the heaviness I had been living in for many years was lifted. I began reading different books about sexuality and what the Bible says about it. I also attended seminars and met with a priest who helped me process sexuality through a faith-based perspective. I also committed not to date at all for a time. These things brought peace to my heart that I had been searching for, and for the first time, my life felt full, like I was living out my true identity.

**For the first time, my life felt full.**

It was not easy to stop acting on my same sex desires, but I had the support I needed to choose not to. In contrast to what most people would think, I actually found great freedom in putting up those boundaries for myself. I am also now free from the anxiety, depression, and duplicity that were continually present in my past lifestyle. I now walk in an authenticity that I didn't know was possible.

*Kim's heart also overflows with joy and love for children in Ethiopia. Visit her ministry at [www.UnforgottenFaces.org](http://www.UnforgottenFaces.org).*

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After deciding I wanted to come out of the homosexual lifestyle, I met Garry, who is now my husband. We have been married 12 years, and we have two children.

MELISSA INGRAHAM

WIFE TO GARRY / PAGE 22

20

From the outside, my life looked pretty perfect. I was attending a private university and was in a long-term relationship with a guy. But inside, I was growing more and more depressed, with a huge sense of emptiness. I felt confused and unsatisfied, so I began to question my sexuality.

My senior year of college I began a lesbian relationship with a woman. At first I thought, *This is what I've been looking for my whole life*, but then I experienced a lot of internal conflict between feeling like it was right, and a nagging sense that it was wrong. I felt a lot of shame, and I had no peace. Our relationship was very intense, but short-lived. She ended things quickly, and I was devastated.

At that point it felt like all my relationships had come crashing down on me, and I reached my lowest point. I felt like I was dying inside. So, I began to ask God for help and look for help externally, as well.

I was nervous to tell my mom and twin sister that I thought I was gay because they were Christians and I thought they would respond harshly. Instead, they both responded by saying, "We don't think this is God's best for you, but we love

you, anyway." My sister invited me to a Christian conference, and I went with her. While I was there, I came to believe that just because I felt something, that didn't make it right.

I began to read books and web pages about healthy sexuality, which were very helpful in providing me with a private way to get information that I needed since I still felt a lot of shame in the beginning. I then joined a local ministry helping people deal with unwanted sexual attractions. That ministry provided support for me in my process by helping me deal with brokenness in my family and helping me to extend forgiveness. A part of that ministry was joining a paid support group, where I learned how to build healthy relationships. I also sought counseling, and attended conferences. Each of those things was instrumental in my healing process.

My life today is 100 times better than it was then. About five years after deciding I wanted to come out of a homosexual lifestyle, I met Garry, who is now my husband. We have been married 12 years, and we have two children. My husband and I have a great sex life, and my level of same-sex attraction is extremely small compared to what it was.

**My life today  
is 100 times  
better than it  
was then.**

# MELISSA INGRAHAM

LOVE AND TRUTH NETWORK / [loveandtruthnetwork.com](http://loveandtruthnetwork.com)



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# GARRY INGRAHAM

LOVE AND TRUTH NETWORK  
loveandtruthnetwork.com



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I was able to find solid, legitimate support that helped me determine my sexuality in a way that lined up with my faith and desires.

GARRY INGRAHAM

HUSBAND TO MELISSA / PAGE 81

**M**y life as a homosexual was pretty chaotic. There were certainly some high points when I was living in sexuality and hanging at a gay bar, but for the most part, the lows were extremely low, and there were many of them. The more I continued to live in homosexuality and identify as a gay man, the more unstable my life became.

I was using a lot of alcohol, sex and other types of distractions in order to just cope with life. I would say that my life was going out of control. I experienced a lot of depression and anxiety. I had a desire not to commit suicide, but to just not exist.

Eventually, I got to a point where the euphoria of coming out, leaving Bible college, finding my first gay bar, and feeling like I had finally found my people started to lift. It was almost two years in, and I was starting to feel hollow. My desire had always been to find Mr. Right and settle down. When that didn't happen, and I was with countless numbers of guys, it was anything but what I had signed up for. I realized there was no hope or joy. There was nothing in it for me.

I grew up going to church, but had experienced some negative aspects. Even as an adult, I have at times. But I started to have a desire to rediscover God in a way that was very different

from what I used to know. The desire didn't have anything to do with wanting to change my sexuality. (At that point, it felt immutable.) All I knew was I needed to turn the reins over to somebody else.

The journey was painful, but good. I started to go to different conferences annually. Those were transformational. I learned from people who were dealing with some of the same issues, and it gave me insight into how some of them had developed in my own life. I wasn't told exactly how it happened, but it helped me put the dots together and realize, *Oh, this makes a lot of sense.*

Books and tapes were also pivotal for me. They really gave me hope for what I was beginning to pursue and were a big part of what brought the change. Counseling also played a crucial part. I was on a pretty desperate journey but was able to find solid, legitimate support that helped me determine my sexuality in a way

that lined up with my faith and desires.

I've been happily married almost 12 years now to my wife, Melissa. Today I sometimes say, "I wouldn't trade my worst day today for my best day then." It's true. There's so much stability, love, and growth in my life now, and there has been for a long time. I'm so thankful.

**I wouldn't  
trade my  
worst day  
today for  
my best  
day then.**

66

I started to ask questions. I needed answers or else I was headed toward ending my life.

### EDWARD BYRD

I used to be known by the name "Remi," a female persona I used to mask the dysfunction and pain of my past. During this season of my life I pursued sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Finding it difficult to understand my pain, I turned to stripping and found myself involved in various sexual activities to find worth and value within myself. I was consumed with the culture and lifestyle of homosexuality; I became convinced it was my only identity.

However, I began to face severe depression and felt disjointed about life; I had faced so many disappointments, as well as broken and abusive relationships. Recognizing the destructive cycles I continually found myself in, I started to ask questions. *Could this be all there is to life? Will I ever experience a truly fulfilling life?* I needed answers or else I was headed toward ending my life.

**I am  
a whole  
new  
person  
inside and  
out.**

Feeling desperate, I searched for other stories like mine on YouTube. Finding videos of people who sought help to find freedom for themselves led me to pursue counseling, support groups and online teachings. Some key social groups supported my efforts to leave that life that had led to further pain and destruction. Through these resources I learned that I had built my life on so many fabrications, and I had to deconstruct the false realities to discover my true identity.

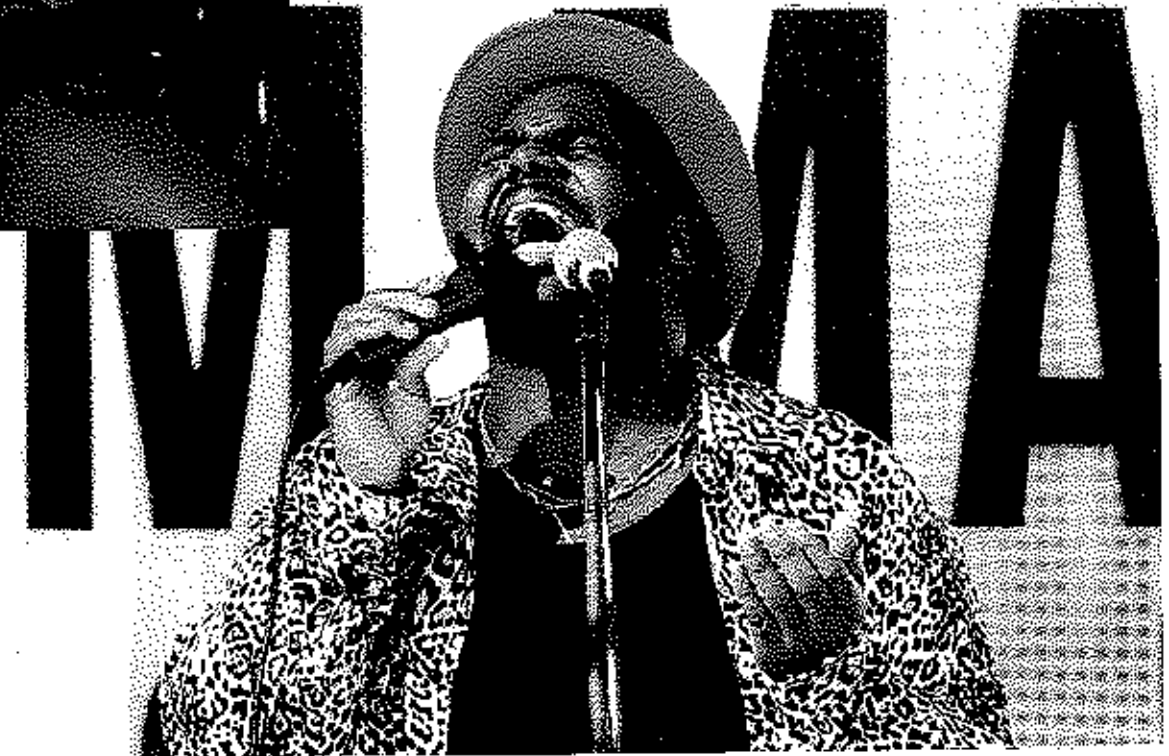
My life today is absolutely nothing like before. I am a whole new person inside and out. I know I have incredible purpose, joy, love, acceptance and peace in my life. Nothing in my past compares to the truth and love I have received from Christ and from the people in my life. I no longer look for fulfillment in dangerous places; I am fulfilled and secure in my sexual identity as a man.

# EDWARD BYRD

TODAY



EDWARD AS 'REMI'



EDWARD BYRD MUSIC  
[facebook.com/edwardbyrdmusic](https://facebook.com/edwardbyrdmusic)



OVER THE RAINBOW  
LUCA JO  
facebook.com/Over-  
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# LUCA GROPPOLI



CHANGED

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I didn't know my own body had rejected me. I didn't realize that my body was simply responding to abuse.

LUCA GROPPOLI

I was born a woman and endured molestation as a child, which left me feeling unprotected and unworthy of genuine love. I came to the mistaken conclusion that 'girls are victims and boys are abusers,' and those were the only two options I saw. Not wanting to be the victim, I subconsciously decided being a boy was safer. Wearing my brother's clothes and seeing how I looked in the mirror certainly had an effect on me. I felt powerful and in control; nothing like how I viewed myself as a girl—weak, worthless and ugly.

I didn't know my own body had rejected me. I didn't realize that my body was simply responding to abuse and that I was experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

My family took me to University of Minnesota's Program in Human Sexuality. It was there after much testing that they concluded I had gender dysphoria. The doctor claimed I received the wrong chromosomes in relation to my hormones and told me either to stay this way and face impending suicide, or have a sex change. A sex change, I thought. *That's perfect. I hate my own body anyway.* I learned all about how to transition: If you get your name changed, live full time as the opposite sex,

and qualify to have hormone therapy, then you can get the operation. I changed my name and lived full-time as a man, but I was never happy. I began to get angrier and more violent and remembered what I believed as a child: boys are abusers. I became very abusive and ended up in jail several times. I never went further with the process of getting a sex change.

Thirty years later, the woman I was living with told me if I was going to live with her I needed to attend church and Bible study. The first time I went to church, a pastor came over and prayed with me, and I encountered a God that I had never known before. After that moment, everything changed; my understanding of right and wrong became more defined, and my heart began to question the life I was living.

As my mindset began to change, suddenly I didn't want to kiss my girlfriend anymore.

One day when we were holding hands, I looked down at our hands and said, 'Why am I holding a woman's hands? I'm a woman. I'm made for a man!'

Soon after, I moved away from my girlfriend. I was met with love by the Christian community and began to learn about absolute surrender to freedom. I've been free eight years now, and I actually love being single.

...suddenly  
I didn't want  
to kiss my  
girlfriend  
anymore.



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Today I live knowing that what once brought me the most shame is completely taken away by a God who didn't avoid my pain or questions.

GABRIEL PAGAN

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I used to be very depressed and constantly paranoid about what people thought about me. I explored sexuality in high school after being exposed to sexual activity and pornography as a kid. Acting out through masturbation and webcams became an obsessive habit to which I lost all control. It got to the point where I was acting out in public what I was seeing on screens.

This brought me to my lowest point, so that I wanted to kill myself.

Unaware that people were praying for me, I suddenly felt motivated to change my life. Someone reached out to me on social media and shared Jesus with me. I accepted Jesus Christ in my driveway, where the Holy Spirit fell on me like fire and led me through a series of spiritual encounters. Later, I received prayer ministry and saw Jesus holding me the first time I was touched inappropriately. I told the Lord that I would never

**Now I'm  
free and full  
of joy.**

sleep with another man if I could have His presence like that forever.

Seven years later and I'm free from being haunted by same-sex attractions, and I'm now married to the love of my life. Having real intimacy and connection with her is my biggest gift from God besides my relationship with Jesus. I'm happy and living a wild life of adventure following Him.

Today I live knowing that what once brought me the most shame is completely taken away by a God who didn't avoid my pain or questions. I serve as a pastor at my local church and lead people through inner healing sessions. My greatest joy is seeing Jesus crush unbelief by stepping into people's pain and watching them encounter the God that kept me from ending my own life. I was addicted and now I'm free. I was depressed and now I'm full of joy. I was full of hate and now I'm moved by love.

# GABRIEL PAGAN



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LOVE REVOLUTION CHURCH  
[loverevchurch.com](http://loverevchurch.com)

# KRISTI STIRLING



CHANGED

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I now am totally free to love without the burden I once carried.

KRISTI STIRLING

Growing up, I never felt fully female. I never seemed to figure out or enjoy normal, healthy friendships with other girls, and I was never attracted to men. Friendships cycled between "too close" or non-existent, because losing a friend felt like my heart was being torn in half.

This lifestyle continued for 18 years, until I grew too close to a woman I mentored. Same-sex attraction both tantalized and scandalized me until I finally was honest with myself and God about where that attraction would take me.

I began to open up and share with different people, which helped me step out of the fog of confusion into wholeness. Despite having hidden my confusion and pain for nearly two decades, sharing my deepest insecurities with trusted friends gave me the support I needed instead of the condemnation I had feared.

During this time I found myself going through a "second puberty," which allowed me to revisit misconceptions I had believed about myself as a 12- or 13-year-old. I was able to recall certain behaviors that had been ruled out for me early on, like wearing nail polish, which had severely affected my self-image. I discovered that my same-sex attraction had been closely connected to the pressure of spiritual perfectionism around me and that I had to live up to a legalistic, rules-driven standard of behavior. I realized I was no longer bound by those rules, but had the freedom to make my own decisions for my womanhood.

Another surprising change I experienced was becoming free from certain emotional triggers. For example, a certain song playing on the radio had once triggered a deep sense of loneliness and longing in my soul for whoever my friend was

at the time. But eventually, that same song would play and I wouldn't even notice it. Later I would remember, *that's that song!* My heart was becoming more whole, and recognizing this change made me feel so joyful and able to celebrate my process.

I also discovered during that second puberty phase that I am free to "love and let go." I learned that I could have a healthy, intimate friendship with another woman without my heart being torn in half when the level of intimacy decreased. In the past I always wanted one friend exclusively, and I didn't want her to have other friends or to entrust her secrets to anyone else. Now I am free to enter into genuine, healthy friendship with many different women. This simply wasn't possible for me in the past, but now it is no longer an issue. To this day, I am deeply satisfied with genuine heart-to-heart connection with a number of friends.

Over time, this process of learning to be honest about my same-sex attraction led me to an intensive week of counseling, during which a lifetime of the pain of self-rejection and fear of others' rejection came rushing to the surface. The image I saw in my mind was of a torturous mountain trail, each turn in the trail an illustration of one of those deeply painful memories. I realized that God had been with me, experiencing my pain with me at every turn. This truth fully set my heart free and removed the sting of that lifetime of pain.

I now am totally free to love without the burden I once carried. My heart is whole again, and I can enjoy genuine friendship pain-free! I would not return to my former life/self for anything in the world. I believe the process of self-discovery, and this level of freedom, are both real and attainable for everyone. They can be discovered and grown into.



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I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man.  
I am free.

JOSHUA PEREZ-RIJOS

92

I came out and told my mom and she said that I was gay when I was in middle school. I had grown up in church, and, before coming out, I had contemplated committing suicide if God didn't change me.

Throughout high school and my early college years, I performed in drag shows as a genderless child. In the midst of those hardcore years in the St. Louis club scene, I went to Puerto Rico every year to visit my dad. God spoke to me in such a profound way through him. My dad knew about situations I'd been in and thoughts I'd had—things I had never told anyone.

I would return to St. Louis feeling freedom and joy and wanting to leave the lifestyle I was living. But I worried about what people were going to think and say because I had made a name for myself in the club scene.

God spoke to me during one trip to Puerto Rico and said that chaotic things were going to happen, but that he was going to protect me. A month later, my city of St. Louis was in

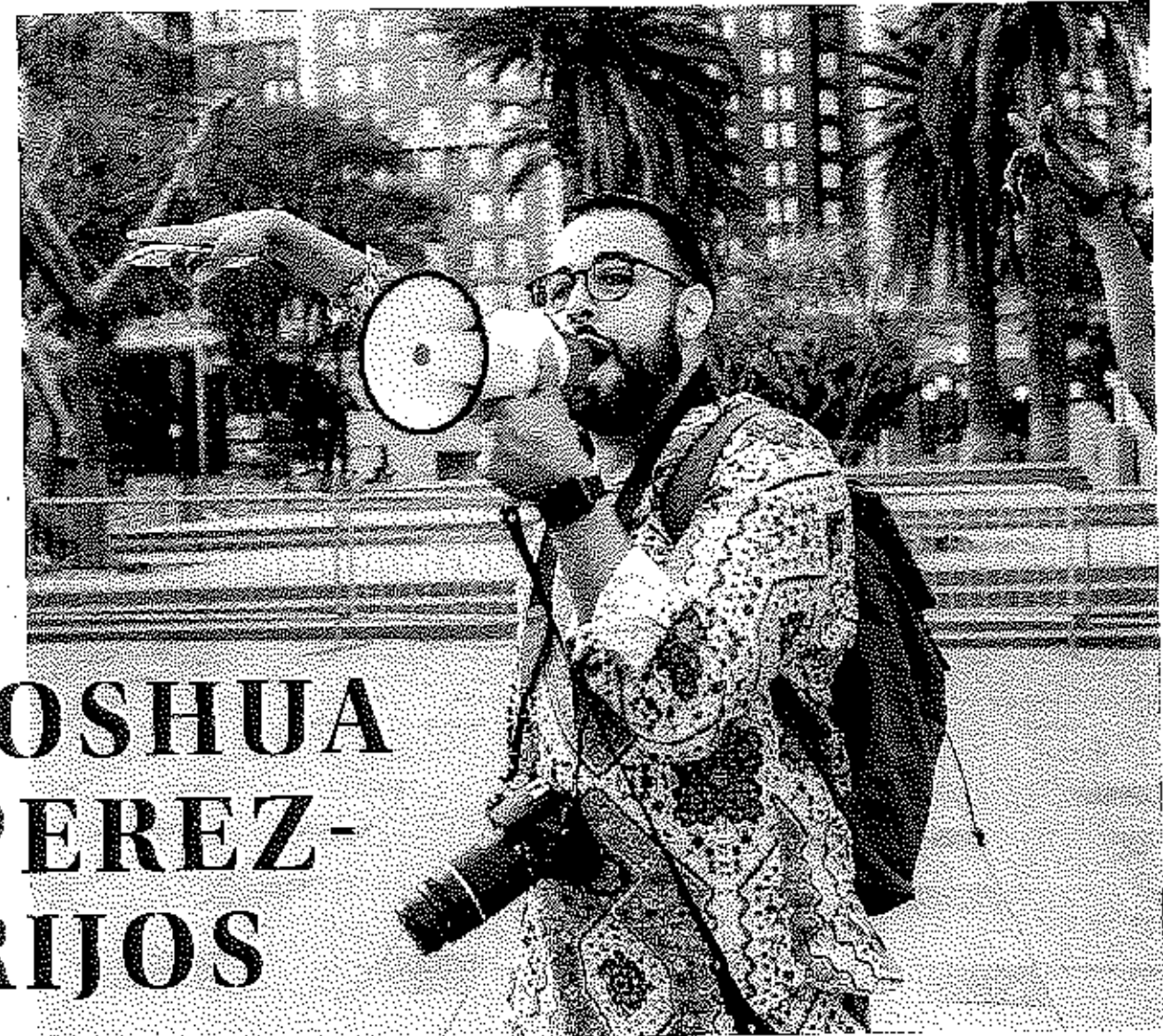
flames. A young black man, Michael Brown, had been killed by a police officer, and the city was in an uproar. At that moment, I realized the world I lived in wasn't the wonderland I had thought. I wanted to change my life.

I told God that I would stop smoking weed by August, but I quickly forgot about this prayer. August came around and I was driving while high. My heart started racing and my vision went white. I pulled over and began to repent. That was the first time I recognized God speaking to me. He said, "Stop filling yourself with that and fill yourself up with me."

From that moment on, I chose Jesus. Being sober has taught me how to build healthy and transparent relationships with people. Before it used to never be that way. I am living out my process in a church community. My sexuality belongs to Jesus. Someday I hope to be married to a woman and have a family, and, until then, I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man. I am free.

**My sexuality  
belongs to  
Jesus.**

CHANGED



**JOSHUA  
PEREZ-  
RIJOS**

93

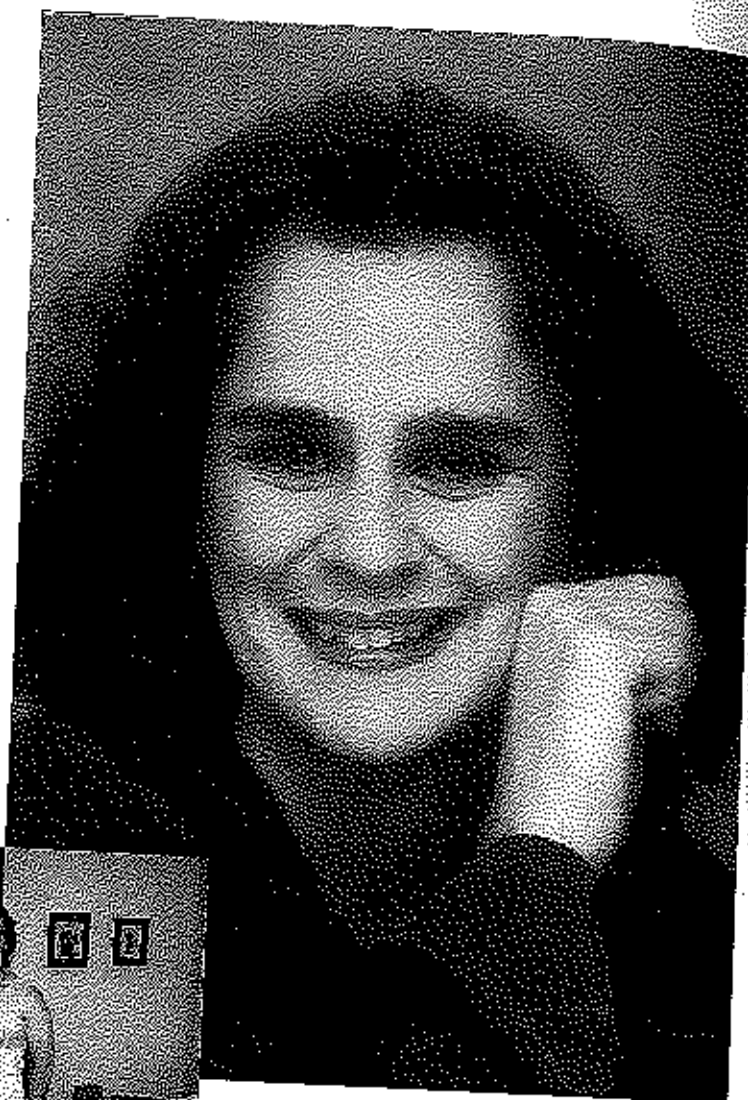
# KATHYGRACE DUNCAN

PORTLAND FELLOWSHIP  
portlandfellowship.com

KATHYGRACE AS "KEITH"



KATHYGRACE IN HIGH SCHOOL



TODAY



My life is very full now. I've been out of the lifestyle for 26 years.

## KATHYGRACE DUNCAN

I hated being a woman. I hated everything about it. I was very detached from my emotions. Even as a kid, it felt like I just existed. I wasn't unhappy. I was a prankster and mischievous, and I loved making people laugh. But always in the back of my mind was a longing to be a boy. I think that's where the personality came from; I thought it was a boy's personality.

My hatred for being a woman made me desperate, so I decided I wanted to live as a man. And I did for 11 years. There was something exciting about being able to date women, and I felt it would make my life complete. I wanted to be free and have all the things I dreamed about come true.

What pulled me out of that lifestyle was women in my life who were married and straight and spoke truth into my life. My pastor and my church were a great help for me in the first five years out. They came alongside me and showed me my lifestyle choices hadn't really been about my sexuality and were instead rooted in unmet relational needs and brokenness. They helped me become more attached to who I am and my emotions, and I began to embrace who I was as a woman.

I also went to a couple of conferences for transgendered people pursuing wholeness. The men there affirmed me as

a woman, and I got to see myself the way God sees me. Over time, I began to realize it wasn't necessarily about going back to being a woman but returning to how God created me to be.

My life is very full now. I've been out of the lifestyle for 26 years. When I think back to those years of living as a man, it feels like a whole other world. I still have the memories, but it seems like I was another person.

I still am a prankster and mischievous, but now I'm also free. Back then, I constantly lived in fear of someone finding out who I was and what would happen to me then. I don't live in that place anymore. I know who I am, and each new day is something to look forward to instead of tugging through. I now

value being genuine instead of trying to hide all the time. Growing up, I was so afraid I would be rejected if I showed any emotion or anything about who I was. That was scary. Now, that's not true. Here I am; this is what you get.

I got healed from so much rejection. And I understand now I'm a good person. I know I'm loved, and I find great value in life. I can't say I felt that way before. I have a confidence in who I am now and that I have value. I may not get it right all the time, but what I have to offer is good.

**I decided I  
wanted to  
live as a man.  
And I did  
for 11 years.**



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At the core of all of this has been a belief that God's power is real and active today.

RODGER GASKIN

I was born "that way," or at least that is the way it felt. For most of my life I was only sexually attracted to men. While I longed for both emotional and sexual intimacy with a man, I also felt as though I didn't belong with other men and that I was a foreigner. At the same time, most of my life I have been surrounded by men who valued and pursued non-sexual relationships with me. They didn't see me as an outsider or as less-than. Many of them knew I struggled with homosexuality, but this didn't deter them from caring for me. Yet I couldn't connect with them. I was deeply uncomfortable with them while longing to be with them.

In my 20s, I started to explore ways to better integrate my faith and sexuality. I began reading books on the topic, and I attended a conference for people with unwavering sexual attractions.

I saw a therapist and worked on many issues, including childhood trauma and depression. And I spent time, often at these conferences or other gatherings, with men and women who had experienced significant change in their sexual orientation.

These resources gave me a vision and hope that real change was possible and that it wasn't a fraudulent claim. At

the core of all of this has been a belief that God's power is real and active today. With this, I have a personal commitment to the belief that sexual relationships are intended to be expressed between a man and a woman only.

At this point in my life, I have experienced magnificent change in the quality of my life. The greatest change has been in how I relate to other men. While I previously felt like an outsider and like I didn't belong, I am now very comfortable in my relationships with other men.

**I am confident and secure in who I am.**

Amazingly, I also find myself sexually attracted to women; what an oddly wonderful experience. With this, there has been a change in my sexual attraction towards men. The more comfortable and closer I have come relationally with other men, the less sexual attraction I have for men.

As I have addressed areas of confusion, trauma, and fear, the power of homosexual desire has lessened. My attention has gone from dealing with the attraction itself to dealing with the root issues behind it. The overall quality of my life has improved, and I am confident and secure in who I am as a human who is fully male. I continue to grow as a man and as a follower of Jesus.

## RODGER GASKIN





# DEREK PAUL

IDENTIFY MINISTRIES, INC.  
[identifyministries.org](http://identifyministries.org)



I am sexually attracted to my wife and more content in my marriage than I could have ever dreamed.

DEREK PAUL

I experienced same-sex attraction for most of my life. I was born into a pastor's family and had a traditional upbringing that I cherished. However, because of some early ongoing harassment from male peers and a gymnastics coach, some intrusive medical exams, and less than optimal family dynamics, I began to experience gender confusion and same-sex attraction as a small child. In high school, I became very involved in the worlds of theater and competitive cheerleading. Those atmospheres and peer groups were enjoyable, but they exposed me to lifestyles that led me to question my identity and purpose.

By college, the constant inner turmoil of same-sex attraction and my conservative Christian worldview came to a crossroad, and I decided to plan my exit strategy and enter the gay lifestyle. Simultaneously, I met a Christian woman whose life had been changed through Jesus to a level

I hadn't yet seen. She was the first Christian to suggest I could seek recovery because of her own experience with God's power and love.

Later I found support and discipleship in an accountability partner and a local support group. Because of the changes in my relationship with God and my supportive Christian community, I felt secure enough to challenge perspectives and worldviews that had gone unquestioned in my heart.

Today, the Christian woman who was my friend has since become my wife. We have been married for 13 years and have 3 children. I am sexually attracted to her and more content in my marriage than I could have ever dreamed. I am no longer bound to sexualize men; I have peace and no longer feel conflicted. My relationships with family and friends are full and enjoyable, and I have gained a lifestyle that surpassed all my expectations.

**I have  
peace and  
no longer  
feel  
conflicted.**

“

I now have a reconciled relationship with my family and the privilege of helping others know that change is possible.

LUIS RUIZ

100

I always knew I wanted to marry a woman and have a family of my own. So when I realized in my childhood that I was attracted to the same sex, I felt my dream might not be possible. I fell prey to the world's narrative that "you are born gay," which left me feeling confused and hopeless. Too fearful to share my same-sex feelings with my parents and my church, I felt disconnected from God and my family because of the tension between my desires and my beliefs.

While I served in the US Army, I secretly explored gay clubs where I medication my pain with partying, drugs and sex with other men. I wanted to drown out the pain of not feeling attracted to women. Throughout those years, I continually felt there had to be more to life than what I was living. When I got out of the Army, I was depressed and alone.

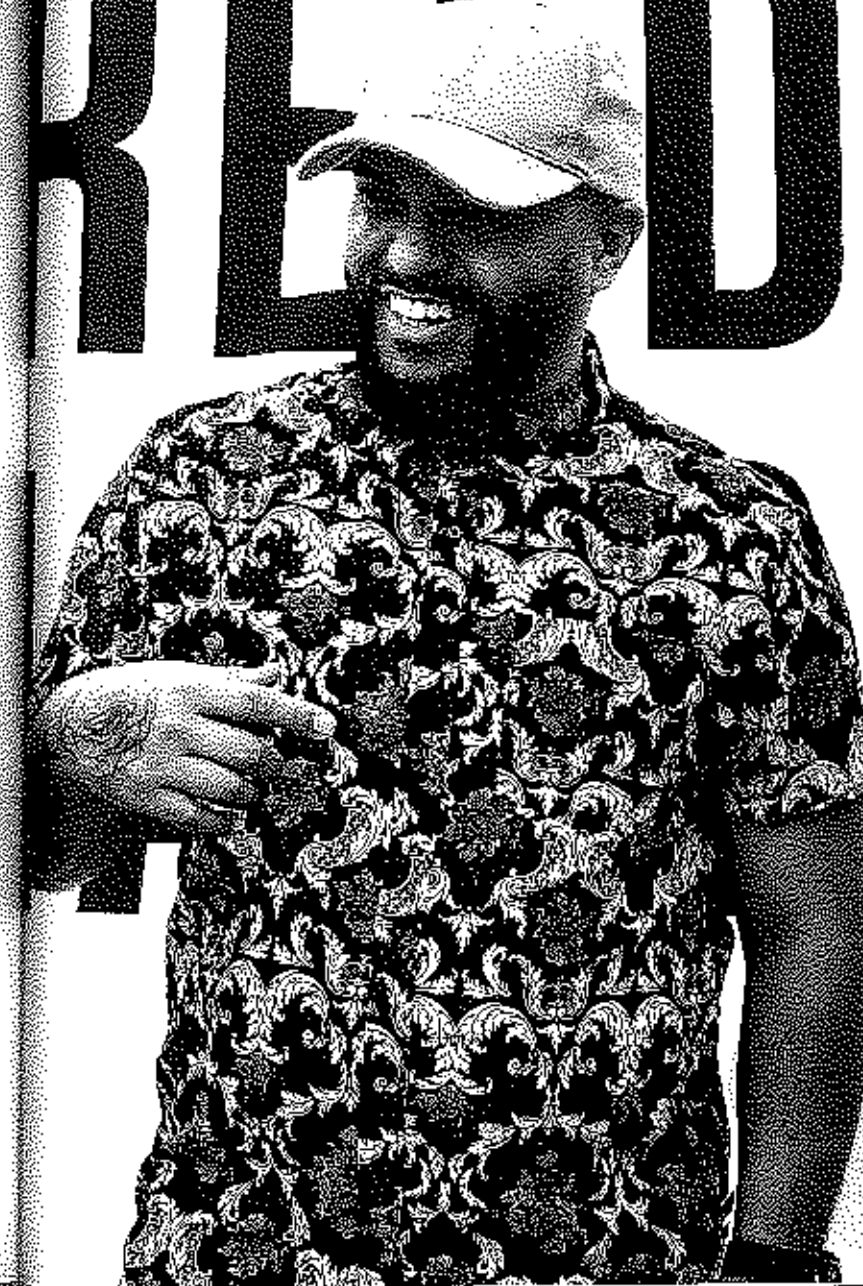
(On June 12, 2016, I was celebrating my birthday at Pulse

**I chose to leave the homosexual lifestyle to pursue my true identity.**

Nightclub in Orlando, when a shooter entered the building and opened fire. After losing many of my friends and being taken to the hospital for wounds sustained during the shooting, I came to learn I was HIV positive. At that moment I dropped to my knees and wept. I wanted to live a healthier life, one that was not centered around sex and damaging behavior.

I started going to a church where I received pastoral care and began connecting with a supportive faith community. I began to fall in love with the faith of my childhood. These resources allowed me to build healthy relationships and pursue a relationship with God. I chose to leave the homosexual lifestyle to pursue my true identity in Jesus. I now live a life free of depression, anxiety and fear, having a reconciled relationship with my family and the privilege of helping others know that change is possible.

RED



LUIS  
RUIZ

*Orlando Pulse Nightclub  
Shooting Survivor*

**FEARLESS IDENTITY**  
[fearlessidentity.co](http://fearlessidentity.co)

101

# MACKY DIAZ



102

CHANGED

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I no longer struggle with the needy feeling that drove me into relationships with men and women. I am happy and whole.

MACKY DIAZ

I grew up believing in God and did all the things that Christians do. As a young woman, I married a man and had a daughter with him. In 1996, that marriage ended and I found myself in another relationship with a man who was abusive. When I got out of that relationship, I made a decision: *That's it. I keep choosing the wrong men and being in bad relationships because I am gay.* So I came out of the closet at 30 years old. I proudly carried the label of lesbian for 12 years. That label did not have the power to make me happy, though. I was still going from relationship to relationship, unhappy and unfulfilled. My heart was broken. I could never find satisfying answers to the questions everyone asked: "Who am I?" and "Who do I belong to?" Every relationship ended with me feeling empty.

One night, while living with a girlfriend of five years, I woke up crying hysterically. I tried to be quiet so I wouldn't wake my girlfriend, but I felt such an overwhelming presence of love in the room. I immediately knew that something had changed. I knew I was loved and would never be alone. I felt different. So

the very next day, I packed up all my favorite things and moved out of my girlfriend's home. My daughter, who had started going to church and building her own relationship with God, had been praying for me. The church she had been going to also decided to pray for me. After leaving my girlfriend, the

questions that haunted me before began to be answered. I started going to this church, and they supported, loved and accepted me. I began to listen to every teaching and message I could find about identity and God. The transformation was truly miraculous.

Today, my life is completely different. Sometimes my friends don't even recognize me. I used to be extremely needy, couldn't sleep without the TV on, and tried to force people to love me in the way I wanted to be loved. Now, I

**I knew that something had changed. I knew I was loved and would never be alone. I felt different.**

have no problem being alone; in fact, I enjoy it. I feel loved, valued, and like I belong. I don't feel like anything is missing. I no longer struggle with the needy feeling that drove me into relationships with men and women. I am happy and whole. I understand who I am now and where I belong.

103



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I became so miserable that I started looking for other ways to fill the void in my soul, including drugs and bulimia.

JANET BOYNES

104

The trauma and pain from my childhood, which was filled with physical and sexual abuse, led me into a series of broken lesbian relationships. Before I entered into a lesbian lifestyle, I had been a Christian and was engaged to be married. My fiancé was gone a lot, and I hated being alone, so I spent a lot of time with a woman from work. This interaction opened the door to my first sexual encounter with a woman, leading me away from God and my fiancé and into a life of lesbianism for 14 years.

Each time I tried to return to God, I felt pulled to hold onto that lifestyle. I even toyed with the idea of getting a sex change to make the relationships more “normal” but couldn’t bring myself to go through with it. I became so miserable that I started looking for other ways to fill the void in my soul, including drugs and eventually bulimia.

**I had finally found what I was looking for.**

One October morning in a grocery store I encountered a woman who invited me to her church. I knew right then and there that our meeting was not a coincidence and that this was a new beginning for me. Through this encounter in 1998,

God intervened in my life and called me out of the lesbian lifestyle. With the help of people at Maple Grove Assemblies of God in Minnesota, I never looked back. I had finally found what I was looking for. After living a lesbian lifestyle for 14 years, I found freedom through Jesus Christ.

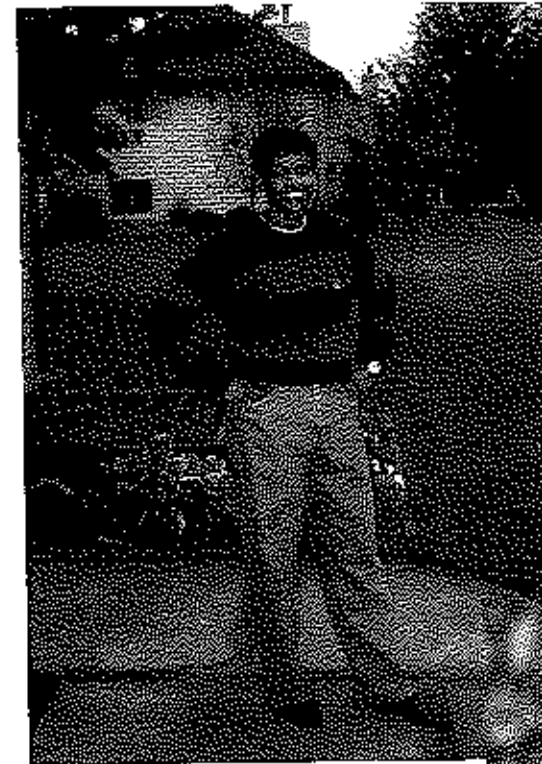
In 2006, Janet Boynes Ministries was incorporated, with the mission of reaching those who are trapped in the struggle that I once found myself in, and on April 20, 2018, I was ordained as a pastor by the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

# JANET BOYNES

JANET BOYNES  
[janetboynesministries.com](http://janetboynesministries.com)

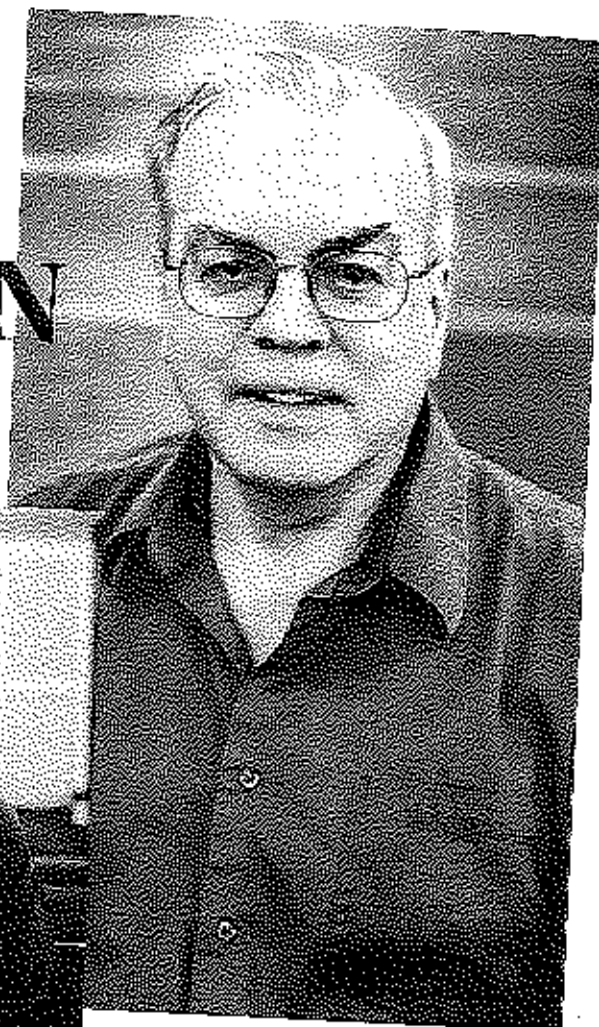
TODAY

BEFORE



105

# DAVID RASMUSSEN



106

CHANGED

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I joined a group of married men who also struggled with homosexuality, and we all encouraged each other and shared our stories. Today I'm happy and peaceful; a better husband and father.

DAVID RASMUSSEN

Diane and I went to high school together and planned on getting married. I didn't have same-sex attractions until college, but at college, I discovered pornography and homosexuality. I was acting out, going to parks, bookstores, restaurants, and bath houses. I didn't know anything about homosexuality. It wasn't talked about, and it was a shameful thing. So I hid it. Diane suspected, and before we got married, I had to tell her I had an STD that I had gotten from a man. Miraculously, she still agreed to marry me. We cried and hugged, and the wedding went on. We both went into marriage thinking it would be a cure.

We learned quickly that marriage was not a cure. We were able to be intimate, but I started living a double life and continued acting out. I put on a facade that everything was fine, but inside I was a mess. I experienced a lot of guilt and shame, but I didn't know I was a sex addict. I felt that what I was doing was wrong, but I didn't know what to do about it. Eventually, I was committing adultery, which made things even worse.

At one of my lowest points, I was at a bathhouse, and an unattractive older man approached me. He asked me to have sex, offering to pay me \$20. I refused, and he asked me to hug him for \$20. I gave him a hug and told him to keep his money.

But when I got home, I looked in the mirror, and I saw that old man. And I saw my future life: no wife, no children, all alone, having to pay for touch. I started to cry and got on my knees, desperate to change. Finally, I became desperate enough that I pursued change, and I started a relationship with God.

I started building healthy relationships with men for the first time in my life, and I learned a lot about being a man, husband, and father through them. I also shared about my struggle publicly at church, and everyone stood and applauded my courage. I also found out about a program that helps people with unwanted same-sex attractions, and they gave me books on the topic. Most importantly, I joined a group of married men who also struggled with homosexuality, and we all encouraged each other and shared our stories.

Despite my mistakes and my struggle, Diane chose to stay with me through it all. She chose to forgive me, and we went on the journey of healing together. We have now been married 48 years and have a very strong marriage.

Today, it is so nice not to be living a double life anymore. I am authentic and let people see who I really am. I don't have to carry a burden anymore. I'm happy and peaceful; a better husband and father.

**We've been  
married 48  
years and have  
a very strong  
marriage.**

107



66

My life without sex addiction or lesbian attractions is more fulfilling than I ever could have imagined.

LYNETTE DOWELL

108

I was molested twice as a young child, and my same-sex attraction started at age seven. While I asked Jesus to come into my life at 13, I was secretly diving into pornography and masturbation, and I just wanted these to end.

At 18, my first marriage began, and my first son was born a year later. While my goal was to be the best mother and wife that I could be, my hidden life remained, and I became depressed during my second pregnancy. Our marriage had also been compromised by our own individual porn addictions. Wanting to make a better life for us, I started college. However, not long after our third son arrived, I completed my degree in nursing and entered the US Army as a Nurse Officer. Since same-sex behavior was not allowed in the service, I turned to sex addiction.

As my military career took over, I found myself in a second marriage, which was more difficult than the first but had another son and daughter while working as a Critical Care Nurse.

Still, I became very depressed and wanted to hurt myself. I

tried psychiatric help, but nothing seemed to address the deep shame of my same-sex attraction, molestation, and my sex addict behavior. As a result, I left my second husband and children.

At this point, I had been fighting same-sex attraction for 34 years and had all kinds of excuses. My favorite excuse became, *I cannot help myself; I was made this way*. However, excuses did not pull my life up from a downward spiral. But one day

**I have never felt so whole.**

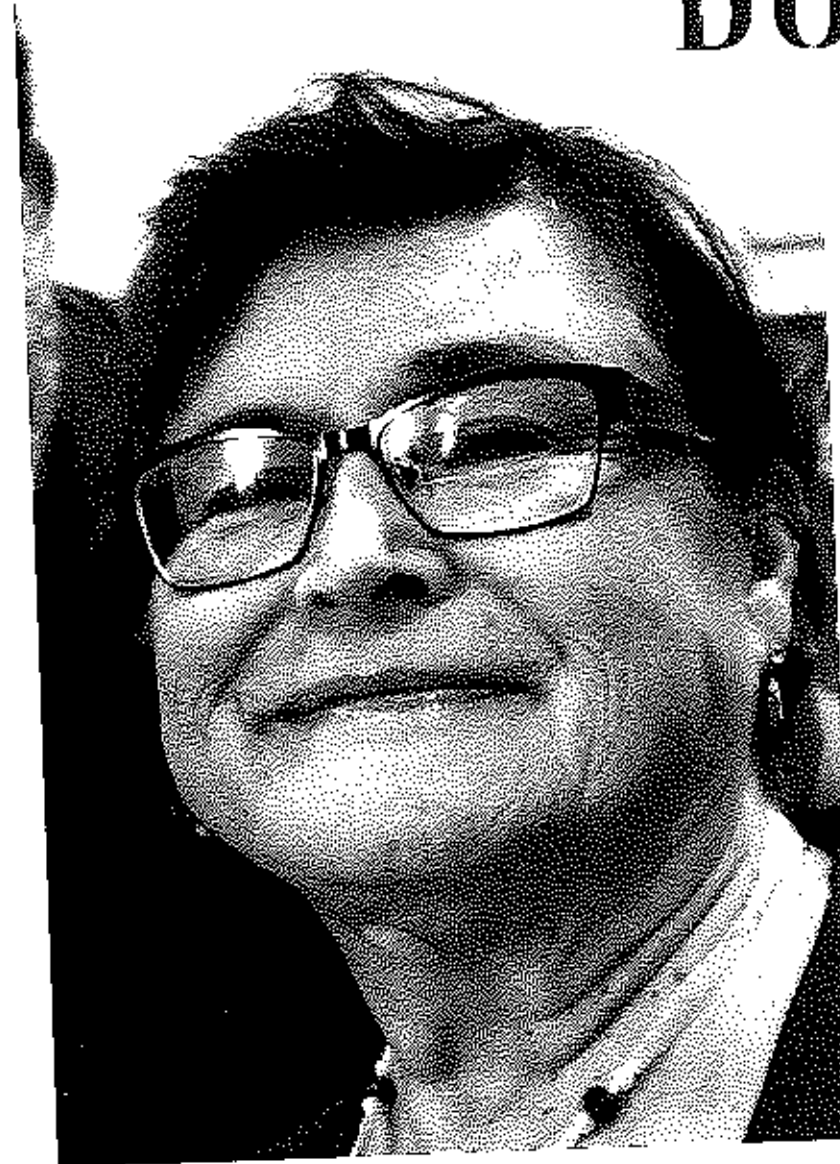
I picked up my dusty Bible and turned to Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me." This became an anthem for me, and I went to see a friend to have him pray for me. When he did, I felt

my heart change.

With counseling, prayer, and reading the Bible, my life started over. My children came back into my life, and I am now currently married to Jon, my loving husband of 24 years. I have never felt so whole. My life as a wife and mother, without sex addiction or lesbian attractions, is more fulfilling than I ever could have imagined.

# LYNETTE DOWELL

AQIM RESTORE MINISTRIES  
[Aqim-restoreministries.org](http://Aqim-restoreministries.org)



109

# CALEB BOGGAN



CHANGED

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The gay identity I once explored had only limited my ability to fully express myself.

CALEB BOGGAN

I've spent my whole life knowing that I was different and that I would never fit in. It wasn't until third grade, when a classmate called me "gay," that I began to question whether or not something was wrong with me. This "gay" label started a pattern in my life of questioning, believing I was broken, and constantly feeling on the outside of masculinity. With a flare for the dramatic and a love of all things Disney, Broadway, and glitter, I felt there was no place for my version of masculinity and even began to question whether I should have been a woman. I stuffed away my emotions and ignored my heart.

Eventually though, I felt like I had no choice but to accept this identity that others had placed on me and began to own a gay identity. So, I turned my back on my convictions and began to explore whether this gay identity fit me. After a long time of venturing down this road, I never found the fulfillment I was looking for in men. I realized how miserable I'd become and how much of myself I'd lost.

I decided that something had to change and began this journey of rediscovering who I was. I discovered that I didn't

have to be gay to be fully me—glitter and all. I eventually found a Christian community where I could be authentic and be open about my struggle so that I could discover for myself the truth about who I was, who God was, and how I wanted to live.

Through open and honest conversations with a few trusted people, I experienced acceptance in my expression of masculinity. If that had not been available to me, I would have been completely alone in the journey. I also realized that God was so much better and kinder than I'd ever known.

Today, I'm more truly myself than I ever imagined possible! Being me, fully male and fully alive, is how I find joy and happiness. The gay identity I once explored had only limited my ability to fully express myself. Now I feel comfortable in who I am as a man. I have been on a beautiful journey to rediscover the unique aspects of my identity and personality that are part of my expression of masculinity. I can be creative, love Broadway, and have emotions, and none of this makes me any less of a man. I have more hope and vision for my life than I've ever had.

**Now I feel comfortable in who I am as a man.**

66

During the years I felt like a man trapped in a woman's body, my heart was closed and isolated. But now, I realize I truly am a woman.

DEBBIE RARICK

Growing up, I felt lost and overlooked within my family. I escaped that loneliness by being outdoors, building forts, picking blueberries or swimming in the lake. I loved being out in the woods alone or with other kids. But there we found stacks of pornographic magazines. As a little girl, I didn't look like the women in those magazines, but neither did I look like the men. This was one reason that I never felt like I fit in among other girls or among the boys.

When I was nine, I saw a movie preview where I first learned about someone having a sex change operation. With this introduction to transgenderism, I began to believe I was a boy in a girl's body. Knowing other people had a similar experience was comforting, but it became my dark secret. I was afraid to tell anyone, and I isolated myself from other girls because I believed I didn't belong.

At age 11, I went to a church camp in the mountains outside Madrid, Spain. There I first learned about and experienced the love of God. I believed in Jesus, but as a teen, I continued to be attracted sexually to females. I never could connect to my

emotions, which set me apart from other girls. I wanted to stop having these feelings somehow, but I never could on my own.

I was taught more about Jesus and began to live out my Christian faith. In college, I became attracted to a man from my ministry group, which at first felt awkward and unfamiliar. We began to date and soon married. We were married nearly 13 years. While enduring a divorce I did not want, I attended a women's prayer group and developed healthy connections to other women. Their love and acceptance touched my heart and overcame years of rejection and misplaced emotions.

These years of healthy community among women helped me value and accept my femininity. Now, I no longer am sexually attracted to other women. I find joy in celebrating the unique aspects of my life as a woman, whereas before I rejected myself. During the years when I felt like a man trapped in a woman's body, my heart was closed and isolated. But now, I realize I truly am a woman: I am passionate, hopeful, vulnerable and nurturing. I love and care for others in ways I never believed would be possible.

**Now, I no longer am sexually attracted to other women.**



# DEBBIE RARICK

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# JENNIFER THORNE



JENS CHAT ON TILAT / [jenschatonthat.blogspot.com](http://jenschatonthat.blogspot.com)

CHANGED

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I pursued growth in my Christian faith, and it began to change me and the way I viewed life.

JENNIFER THORNE

I didn't know how to relate to other women, and I didn't know how to relate to men, either. Growing up I'd had no close friends who were girls. I was a tomboy and played with the boys. So, it felt as though I had gone from having no relational connections with women whatsoever to having sexual relationships with them. I felt that men were unsafe, and I couldn't connect with them emotionally.

I started living a homosexual lifestyle when I was a teenager, and I was sexually promiscuous. When I was 24, I became close friends with a woman who was unwilling to get sexually involved with me because I did not share her Christian faith. I was miserable and in an emotional downward spiral. Thankfully, some family members offered me some much needed unconditional love and were there for me to help answer my questions.

My cousin gave me a book asserting the reality of God, and it spoke deeply to me personally. I prayed to become a Christian, but secretly my motivation was to coerce this woman to have

a sexual relationship with me. After I did become a Christian, she had no more reservations about being with me, and we lived together as if we were married for two years.

I pursued growth in my Christian faith, and it began to change me and the way I viewed life. I reached a point where I felt that it wasn't healthy for me to pursue homosexual relationships anymore. So eventually, my girlfriend and I broke up.

**Today, I no longer experience same-sex attraction at all.**

I began pursuing relationships with women who were safe and who accepted me where I was, even with my complete lack of understanding of how to relate appropriately to women. They helped me learn how to have real, healthy relationships. Now I love the world of women; it's my favorite place to be. I love to lead, teach and encourage women, and my relationships are extremely different from before. Today, I no longer experience same-sex attraction at all.

Two years after breaking up with my girlfriend, I married my husband. We have been married now for 30 years. We have five children together, and the youngest is 13.



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I'm no longer in a place of hopelessness, shame, and regret.  
Instead, I feel happiness, fulfillment, and acceptance.

## JONATHAN HACKER

116

I grew up as a pastor's kid and, therefore, spent a lot of time in church. As a kid, I didn't have many friends and found myself always searching for attention and acceptance. At an early age, I was molested by a man close to our family. As a result, I learned some things that would forever affect me. I dated girls as I went through middle school and high school, but I also experimented with guys whom I was friends with.

At the age of 19, I started dating a girl I thought was 'the one,' but she ended up breaking my heart. I made a vow to never be hurt again by a woman. That is when I started dating guys and felt that I was getting more attention and acceptance. I thought that my parents wouldn't love or accept me because of the life that I chose, so I moved to Atlanta, where I started using and selling drugs.

Eventually, I got involved in the gay adult entertainment industry, doing videos and magazines. At this point, my life was out of control. I was arrested multiple times and found myself potentially facing a sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

But because of God and a praying community, I received a court order to go to a place called No Longer Bound, which is a regeneration program. There I found God again. I always thought I was too far gone and had done too much stuff to ever be forgiven. But, the guilt and shame fell away, and love and acceptance came. I discovered my own worth, and I learned how to forgive the people who hurt me in the past. I was able to move on.

I really didn't have anyone when I first decided to change my life. All I had was my faith. My church was a big support, and sharing with others also made me stronger. It seems that the hardest thing to do is to truly trust God. But, He did have a plan for my life.

My life now is awesome. God brought me out of a 13-year destructive lifestyle and conquered my meth addiction. I'm no longer in a place of hopelessness, shame, and regret. Instead, I feel happiness, fulfillment, and acceptance. I have been married to my wife for three years and have two children.

JONATHAN  
HACKER

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IF THIS BOOK HAS IMPACTED YOU  
OR YOU'D LIKE MORE INFORMATION,  
PLEASE REACH US AT:

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